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The Nation.

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THE PRESIDENT'S PRESS SECRETARY SAID THAT THE TRADITIONAL HOLIDAY PHRASE "SENDS THE WRONG MESSAGE TO GOD AND OUR ENEMIES ABOUT OUR NATION'S RESOLVE TO DISARM SADDAM HUSSEIN."
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SAID THE PRESIDENT: "WHO ARE WE TRYING TO FOOL? WE ALL KNOW WHAT'S ABOUT TO HAPPEN. WHY GET GOD'S HOPES UP?"

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LETTERS

SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT ON SCHOOLS

Boston

■ There's a lot of, to use Peter Sacks's words, "heavy lifting" ahead of us on many fronts—including education ["A Nation at Risk," Nov. 18, 2002]. Naturally, I'd have preferred unadulterated praise and assurances that this one book had done it all—Sacks seems to have wanted me to write a rather different kind of book. But there's more to be done and he fairly lays out the tasks ahead of us all, tasks no single article or book will ever satisfy.

But I regret that Sacks missed entirely what I believe—and emphasize in the book—is the essential glue of my argument: that we cannot reform schools for democracy until we deal with the "relationship thing." That includes the relationships between adults, but above all the fast disappearing relationship between our kids and the grown-up world in general. Kids aren't keeping company with adults anywhere, and schools are one place we could change this—if we worked at creating the kinds of schools where we could work out the complex issues of trust. In the absence of such trusted adults, schools cannot serve as a counterbalance to the company kids do keep: their peers, the shopping-mall world and the ubiquitous marketplace metaphors that the popular media immerse them in.

I hope *The Nation* begins to cover more of the kinds of insider stories that bring to life what goes on in the many schools struggling to build an alternative vision, because until we can imagine a different future we can't invent it.

DEBORAH MEIER

East Hills, NY

■ Peter Sacks attaches appropriate importance to one of today's primary political assumptions: that education reform should be based on a "market driven" philosophy. According to this belief, parents and students, as knowledgeable consumers, will choose schools that deliver the highest-quality products or services, as measured by standardized test scores. Sacks concludes that this approach is "a cynical ploy to privatize the nation's public schools."

Sacks omits from his review the mention of school vouchers, the financial mechanism that empowers parents to implement their choice of school. After all, the ultimate power of consumers is to pick up their marbles (in this case, their children) and shop (or educate them) elsewhere. Thus, the concept of government-provided vouchers entered the lexicon of school reform.

School vouchers became popular during the early 1990s, when the public's frustration with the public schools was at its height, feeding upon the "Nation at Risk" report; the economic recession of the late 1980s and early 1990s; and the negative comparisons of US schools versus Germany's and Japan's. In the latter part of the decade, as the American economy improved, vouchers became less popular, and the term was dropped from political campaigns, but not the idea of using them as a tool to reform schools.

With this year's passage of "No Child Left Behind" legislation, parents in "failing schools" became entitled to select a tutoring program at the public school district's expense. Though the word "voucher" is omitted from the legislation, the concept of public money, directed by individual parents, to pay for private educational services has become institutionalized.

MARC F. BERNSTEIN

Los Angeles

■ Having taught for twenty-eight years in the Los Angeles Unified School District, I find it laughable when I hear critics claim that the panacea for failing schools is to run them like businesses. First, public schools have to "hire" everyone who shows up at the schoolhouse door, regardless of skills, motivation or interest. Second, public schools cannot fire students who are chronically tardy, absent, disruptive and unprepared. Third, public schools are expected to increase productivity annually, despite Dickensian working conditions that include leaking roofs, no air conditioning, fetid restrooms and inadequate supplies and textbooks. Fourth, public schools cannot cite catastrophic events in the personal lives of students that impact performance. Fifth, teachers who fail to consistently boost standardized test scores are not rewarded with bonuses and golden parachutes. Critics have things turned around. Rather than running public schools like businesses, why not run businesses like public schools? Maybe then the absurdity of their argument will become apparent.

WALT GARDNER

Baltimore

■ Peter Sacks notes that the head of New York City's schools is promising hefty bonuses to area superintendents who manage to ratchet up scores on standardized tests. Isn't this a little like awarding hefty bonuses to corporate CEOs for ratcheting up the stock prices of their companies? Both cases are predicated on the assumption that higher numbers reflect underlying achievement—increased learning for students, increased profits for shareholders. But as American investors have painfully learned, there can be a huge disconnect between stock prices and profits, and the same is bound to be true when it comes to test scores and real learning. As Sacks noted, improvements on targeted tests "typically cannot be detected in other tests of achievement." The lesson here is that public education is not as susceptible to "corporate innovation" as policy-makers may think, and it would be wise for them to abandon their misguided faith in numbers.

HOWARD BLUTH

SACKS REPLIES

Boise, Idaho

■ I'd rather not trade swipes with Deborah Meier, an educational innovator whom I greatly respect and admire. She's written an important book that, in my view, occasionally falls short in some respects, and I felt duty-bound to state so in what I believe was a fair-minded review. That our society has relinquished to popular culture the trusting relationships that

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EDITORIALS

A Sorry Lott

Trent Lott has grudgingly relinquished his grip on the Senate majority leader post, but that doesn't mean that the Republican Party has purged "the spirit of Jefferson Davis" that Lott famously described as living on in the party platform. Indeed, on the same day that Lott resigned, GOP Congressman Cass Ballenger of North Carolina told the *Charlotte Observer* that Georgia Democratic Representative Cynthia McKinney was "a bitch" whose politics had so provoked him that "I must admit I had segregationist feelings." Like Lott when his approving comments about Dixiecrat Strom Thurmond's 1948 presidential campaign caused a storm of protest, Ballenger insisted that he was guilty only of a poor "choice of words."

Lott's fate was sealed when the White House decided it needed a smoother, and smarter, son of the Confederacy running the Senate. But the record of Tennessee Senator Bill Frist, elected December 23, is no better than Lott's: The NAACP gives him a 15 percent rating in its latest survey of Senate votes compared with 12 percent for Lott; the latest National Hispanic Leadership Agenda survey gave Frist 18 percent to Lott's 27. A People for the American Way study of the voting records of Lott, Frist and the three other contenders for Senate leader (Mitch McConnell, Don Nickles and Rick Santorum) showed that all five cast identical votes on civil rights measures that include the Employment Nondiscrimination Act of 1996 and the Hate Crimes Expansion Act of 2000.

The reason the White House turned on Lott had little to do with distaste for the Mississippian's remarks at Thurmond's 100th birthday party; it moved only when it appeared the controversy might expose a penchant to play the race card when convenient. Bush, in trouble in the 2000 primaries, appeared at Bob Jones University, which lost its tax-exempt status for maintaining a policy that "students who date outside their own race will be expelled." His Attorney General, John Ashcroft, led the fight against desegregating Missouri schools and praised Confederate generals as "Southern patriots." Bush still hopes to resubmit his federal appeals court nomination of Charles Pickering, who in 1994 tried to soften the sentence of a convicted cross-burner.

As the Lott controversy played out, prominent conservatives griped that attention to Republican positioning on race might make it politically unpalatable for the White House to back a challenge to race-based affirmative action in a pending Supreme Court case. And the *Wall Street Journal* condemned Lott's "unprincipled apologies"—particularly his sudden embrace of affirmative action—for steering the GOP "away from clear thinking about race." What these conservatives want is a return to the pre-Lott good old days when it was possible for the President's aides to sell him as a "new kind of Republican" while quietly using race-based appeals.

The question is whether Democrats and the media will allow this to happen. Only after civil rights groups, members of the Congressional Black Caucus and House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi raised a ruckus—with an assist from a handful of conservatives who actually think the GOP has to clean up its act—did most Senate Democrats, including party leader Tom Daschle, consider doing the right thing. With Lott out, Democrats face as great a test as Republicans: Will they refuse to permit the race card to be played any longer, or will they welcome the return of the conspiracy of silence that permitted Lott and others like him to operate so successfully for so long?

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Prick Up Your Ears

How does a fiercely anticorporate musician feel about participating in a corporate entertainment system? "Rage Against the Machine was able to deliver 15 million subversive pieces of plastic across the globe," responds former Rage guitarist Tom Morello, in the forum convened by rock critic Ann Powers that begins on page 11. The contradictions, tensions and political and artistic ferment that persist in today's popular music scene are the subject of this special issue, which observes the oft-surprising results when politics and music collide—whether in a mass of grooving Le Tigre fans, amid a tattooed throng of antiabortion Christian punks or in the gold-trimmed Manhattan suite of hip-hop-mogul-turned-reparations-activist Russell Simmons.

While these political currents may not always run in our direction, savvy left-leaning artists are busy reinventing the protest music tradition, often beneath the radar. It's easy to assume that rap, for example, has been given over to "cocaine-cooking, cartoon-watching, gold-rims-coveting and death-worshiping," as Jeff Chang writes in his essay here. Listen a little harder, though, and you'll hear artists in the conscious-rap and neosoul genres who are taking seriously the hip-hop generation's cliché of "keeping it real," being true to one's roots of struggle. While such a commitment may not always require a wholesale rejection of the corporate music world, there are those who continue in that still- righteous punk tradition, exemplified by the cultural project known as *Punk Planet*, profiled by Ivan Kreilkamp on page 25.

That edgy, countercultural music continues to be made is testament to the spirit of the artists (and the appetite of the fans), who are often at odds with their industry patrons. Indeed, much of this music may never reach your ears. Radio today is more corporate, more conglomerated and more corrupt than at any time in history, as Jenny Toomey discusses on page 28. Waves of deregulation that started in the 1980s and accelerated with the passage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act have made it possible for one corporation to buy as many as eight radio stations in a single market. And in payola-like schemes, the "Big Five" music companies, through third-party promoters, shell out thousands of dollars per song to radio conglomerates in order to insure big hits. Instead of moving to right these wrongs, the FCC, under chairman Michael Powell, is looking for new ways to loosen the rules. But at least one member of Congress is fighting back: Senator Russ Feingold's Competition in Radio and Concert Industries Act would, among other things, crack down on pay-for-play deals and force an examination of the impact that consolidation of radio ownership has had on culture in America.

The effects of consolidation and deregulation in the music industry are invisible to many, but that's the point. Without our consent, choice—at the megastore, on the air, in the concert hall—is being dictated by the big companies that manage music. To be sure, they're still promoting a number of inspired, socially conscious artists—like Bruce Springsteen, Natalie Merchant and Mos Def, in addition to those featured here—and if you turn up the volume, you may hear the politics. With this issue, you'll know where to listen—inside and outside the industry.

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COMMENT

Blind Sweeps Return

They say history repeats itself. But usually not quite so quickly. On December 19, the press reported that the Immigration and Naturalization Service had arrested hundreds of Muslim men in Los Angeles alone. The INS refused to say how many had been detained but, speaking anonymously, did not dispute lawyers' estimates of 500–700 detainees. One family described a 16-year-old boy being taken, in tears, from the arms of his pregnant mother. It was as if a September 2001 archive news loop had mistakenly made its way into today's news.

The next day, INS officials complained that the figures had been inflated, said the actual number was only in the "low 200s" and reported that most were being released. But whether in the 200s or the 500s, the latest wave of arrests of Muslim men suggests that John Ashcroft's Justice Department continues to prosecute the war on terrorism as if it's a war on Arabs and Muslims generally—by treating Arab and Muslim men as presumptively guilty, wasting precious resources targeting innocents and alienating the very communities he needs to work with if he is to have any chance of capturing Al Qaeda operatives.

The recent arrests in Los Angeles stem from the INS's "call-in" Special Registration program, the latest in a series of Justice Department ethnic profiling initiatives. It requires foreign nationals from twenty Arab and Muslim countries to report to INS offices to be fingerprinted, photographed and interrogated. Most of those arrested came from the largely conservative, decidedly nonterrorist population of Iranian immigrants who have settled in the Los Angeles area.

In terms of security gained for liberty lost, no post-9/11 initiative has been more of a bust than Ashcroft's mass preventive-detention campaign. Ashcroft proudly defended it last year as a way of getting "suspected terrorists" off the streets. Since 9/11 the government has detained an estimated 2,000 such "suspected terrorists," yet only four detainees have been charged with any terrorist-related crime (and none have been convicted), and virtually all have been affirmatively cleared by the FBI of any involvement in terrorism. But the campaign continues.

Two days after the terrorist attacks, Ashcroft warned that "we must not descend to the level of those who perpetrated Tuesday's violence by targeting individuals based on their race, their religion or their national origin." Since then he has directed a preventive-detention campaign almost exclusively against Arab and Muslim immigrants, formally made a top priority of deporting foreign nationals from Arab and Muslim countries, called in for "voluntary" interviews thousands of male immigrants from Arab and Muslim countries and now requires roughly the same population to register and report to the INS on a regular basis.

As many have pointed out, terrorists are unlikely to report themselves as such just because they are told to register. And if intelligence officials are right that Al Qaeda sleepers generally lead quiet, unremarkable lives in conformity with legal requirements, the INS would have no way of knowing even if an Al Qaeda member *were* to walk in. The real reason for the program, it seems, is to detain and interrogate Arabs and Muslims without regard to any objective links to terrorism, and to create a new round of legal obligations to serve as pretexts for future arrests in the next preventive-detention wave. It's fully in keeping with Ashcroft's announcement earlier in 2002 that the INS would start enforcing a requirement that all immigrants report changes of address within ten days of moving. The theory seems to be that if we impose enough technical obligations on the immigrant community, and especially on its Arab and Muslim sector, we'll make them all vulnerable to arrest at the Attorney General's discretion. As one of the signs at a protest in Los Angeles asked, "What's Next? Concentration Camps?"

DAVID COLE

David Cole (cole@law.georgetown.edu), The Nation's legal affairs correspondent, is the co-author of Terrorism and the Constitution: Sacrificing Civil Liberties in the Name of National Security *(New Press).*

Venezuela on the Brink

Caracas

As the general strike against President Hugo Chávez entered its third week in early December, a major TV channel broadcast statements by baseball hero Andres Galarraga and other celebrities calling on Venezuelans to put aside differences for the sake of peace. What was significant about the TV spots was that the channel, along with the rest of the Venezuelan media, has played a key role in promoting the strike as well as marches and acts of civil disobedience sponsored by the opposition. Galarraga's plea—made beside a statue of the Virgin Mary—reflects the conviction among the nation's 50 percent who are neither pro-government nor pro-opposition that Venezuela is on the brink of civil war.

Chávez counts on active support among popular sectors, specifically those lacking steady employment and labor benefits of any kind, who make up more than half the work force. He also counts on a more loyal armed forces than this past April, when a group of officers removed him from office for forty-eight hours. On the other hand, his radical rhetoric favoring the poor over the "privileged" has alienated the middle class, despite his recent efforts to create his own movement called "the positive middle

ON THE WEB: This holiday season the Bush Administration has put selfishness at the top back in style: Peter Dreier and Kelly Candaele survey numerous goodies being given to the rich. John Nichols remembers the late Joe Strummer, the passionate, socially conscious songwriter for the Clash. Peter Bergen points to a Saudi, not Iraqi, connection to Al Qaeda; Donald Kerwin argues that post-9/11 immigration changes threaten to cause great suffering while yielding few security benefits; and Matt Bivens says major Homeland Security Act provisions are more about protecting corporate profits than about homeland security (www.thenation.com).

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COMMENT

class." The middle- and upper-class eastern part of Caracas has solidly supported the strike and its mobilizations.

While the success of the strike call has been at best mixed in commerce, public education, public transportation and the steel and aluminum industries, a large majority of administrative employees and executives of the all-important state petroleum company PDVSA (the fourth-largest US oil supplier and owner of Citgo) responded positively, as did many in charge of fuel transportation. When delays in gasoline distribution produced three-hour lines at the pumps on December 18, the government decreed that private trucks carrying fuel and food could be taken over and run for the duration of the conflict. Carlos Fernández, president of the main business organization Fedecámaras, called the measure a "violation of property rights." A point of honor of the pro-Chávez movement is 100 percent state ownership of PDVSA, incorporated into the nation's new Constitution in 1999.

The opposition's militancy dates back not to 1998, when Chávez was elected president, but to 2001, when he radicalized his government by prioritizing economic and social reform. In November of that year he passed agrarian reform and legislation prohibiting private control of joint ventures for oil exploitation. Fedecámaras reacted by calling a one-day general strike. The business organization was joined by the main labor federation, the Confederation of Venezuelan Workers (CTV), whose leadership Chávez refused to recognize on the grounds that it had held fraudulent internal elections. Since then the CTV and Fedecámaras have called three more general strikes, including the one in April that led to the abortive military coup.

One unique feature of the general strike that began on December 2 is the absence of any demand other than the removal of President Chávez, either by resignation or immediate elections. All rhetoric is reduced to one simple message: Chávez must go. Recently, CTV president Carlos Ortega began calling Chávez "the dictator." Every evening Ortega and Fernández sit next to each other and read a statement summing up the day's strike activity, which is broadcast live on the nation's four major TV channels. This prolonged cozy relationship between labor and management, in which all demands are subordinated to the government's ouster, is also a rarity for Latin America, if not the world.

Chávez has offered to hold a recall election in August, in accordance with the 1999 Constitution. But opposition leaders are unwilling to wait, claiming that by August, Chávez will have further consolidated his control of the armed forces by favoring his military loyalists with promotions. According to government supporters, the real reason is that the opposition wants Chávez out by January 1, the date of Lula's presidential inauguration in Brazil, which, along with the recent election of leftist Lucio Gutiérrez in Ecuador, fortifies Chávez's position. Both Lula and Chávez place antineoliberalism at the top of their agenda rather than promoting such radical visions as socialism, an approach now shared by many leftists throughout the continent. The two favor a government that plays a strong role in the economy in favor of economic development and social justice rather than bowing out to the private sector.

These explanations are just part of the story. A more decisive factor is the built-in vulnerability of the opposition. A political opposition based exclusively on attacking the head of state without presenting demands, proposals or alternatives tends to lose steam over time. The political parties of the opposition were discredited by the rampant corruption and economic contraction of the twenty years before Chávez's election. Now the media, Fedecámaras and the CTV have displaced them as key actors, a role that is unnatural and discredits them as time goes on. The CTV's alliance with the business sector is widely criticized even by those opposed to Chávez.

The US and Spanish governments were practically alone in welcoming the April coup against Chávez. While Spanish Prime Minister José Maria Aznar continues to support the Venezuelan opposition in its call for immediate elections, Washington has in recent months maintained an officially neutral position, despite the National Endowment for Democracy's generous funding of opposition groups over the past several years. Thus the United States now defers to the Organization of American States, whose secretary general, César Gaviria, has brought both sides to the table in an attempt to work out a solution to the impasse. Only by Washington's adherence to this position, and its avoidance of its earlier, misguided endorsement of antidemocratic forces, can Gaviria's commendable efforts be given a chance.

STEVE ELLNER

Steve Ellner is co-editor of Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era: Class, Polarization and Conflict, *recently released by Lynne Rienner.*

CALVIN TRILLIN

On Not Running For the Presidency

We now feel warm toward Albert Gore,
Who will not run in aughty-four.
Most candidates, I must admit,
Seem at their best the day they quit.

Innocent Abroad

I went to a reception the other night to celebrate the efforts of a group called the Innocence Project, which provides legal assistance to prisoners for whom the technology of DNA testing may now provide proof that they did not commit the crimes they've been found guilty of. One such man, Clark McMillan of Memphis, Tennessee, was in attendance that night, having recently been declared a free man. McMillan was 23 when he was sentenced to 119 years in prison. He is now 45.

He was in New York City for only one day. I figured he might like to take in a few sights while he was here, so I asked if he'd ever been to the Museum of Natural History. He looked me in the

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eye and took a second before answering my question. One of the things I now know about men who have spent large amounts of time in prison is that they are not in a rush.

"Well," he said, "I haven't been anywhere."

So I asked if he'd like to go, and he would.

I have always loved this museum, but it was hard to know where to begin with a person who has never seen a dinosaur skeleton, or a diorama of kudus on the plains of Africa, or an exhibit of minerals, or a great white whale. I figured we'd just walk along and stop whenever something looked particularly interesting, which was often. After a while, we took a break and got a cup of coffee and a danish. "Food," McMillan said, "is a wonderful thing to me now."

As hard as it is for a person to take in the contents of the Museum of Natural History in a morning, it's impossible to get a handle on twenty-four years a man spent in prison for a crime he did not commit. But I wanted to know how it was that this well-spoken and thoughtful person could emerge from prison, as he seemed to, singularly lacking in rage or bitterness. "What's the point?" he said. "If I spent my time that way, I'd only be imprisoned again."

Over the course of his many years in prison, McMillan was transferred frequently and without notice from one facility to another—a way, he said, "for them to keep you disorganized." He received few visitors over the years. But he discovered a love of reading, and that sustained him. Things you think you can't live without, it turns out you can, he told me. "I found other forms of bliss."

He also wrote letters, hundreds of them. He wrote to people whose names he saw in magazines, authors of books he read, people he saw on television, religious leaders. He wrote to the *Wall Street Journal* one time and, as a result, got a free subscription for a number of years, during which time he followed the stock market and invested a hundred dollars in penny stocks. He did well, multiplied his money—felt, he said, "like this ultra-hip jet-setter"—and got the whole cellblock interested in the market, but then he was transferred to another prison, and he couldn't keep up with his stocks anymore.

Mostly, when he wrote letters, he didn't expect to hear back, and he hardly ever did, but still, it was some kind of contact with the world, just sending out that letter.

Not easy, though. First you had to get a pencil smuggled in.

No pencils in prison?

Not where they put him.

So what would he do when the point got dull? No sharpeners, probably.

You use your fingernails. Or your teeth.

How about paper?

"Paper," he said. A group of schoolchildren had just filed past us, where we sat in the museum coffee shop, with our danish, and for a moment he seemed totally engrossed in watching the children noisily lining up, shifting their backpacks, getting ready to go into the IMAX theater.

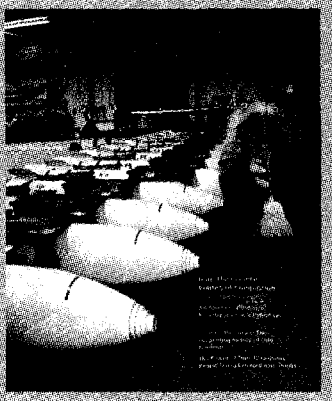
"You hold a sheet of toilet paper a little ways over the sink," he told me, "and let the water run hot, till the steam rises. When it gets a little damp, you rip off another sheet and press that

(Continued on Page 31)

the **new face** of nature

ORION

The Magazine of Culture, Creativity, and Change



In the January/February issue of *Orion*:

When Compassion Becomes Dissent
David James Duncan on Iraq and the effects of war rhetoric on our language—and on our people

An American Obsession
Keeping Score in a Hybrid Car with Bill McKibben

The New Eden
Hope or prophecy? The disquieting paintings of Odd Nerdrum

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ALEXANDER COCKBURN

The Incubator Returns!

So onward into 2003 we go, amid INS roundups of Middle Easterners in Southern California and the grand hunt for Saddam's "material breaches," which could be a song out of Gilbert and Sullivan. As Hilaire Belloc wrote in his "Lord Lundy," "The stocks were sold; the Press was squared:/The Middle Class was quite prepared." The press is certainly squared, with no one encouraged to challenge the grand consensus on our national virtue, confronting the satanic forces.

Back in early 1991, I was the first journalist, right here in *The Nation*, to question the charge, promoted by Amnesty International, that Iraqi soldiers had taken more than 300 babies from incubators in Kuwait and tossed them on the cold hospital floor. In the end the incubator atrocity turned out to have been concocted by the PR firm Hill & Knowlton, with its main witness being the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador to Washington. The story was the best advertisement from that war of the old line about truth being the first casualty.

You can't keep a good lie down. As FAIR recently reported, HBO did a retrospective on CNN's coverage of Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait and its aftermath, and—guess what—there was the incubator atrocity, large as life, without a blemish to its name. Most such news "management" is entirely voluntary.

The Berlin daily *Tageszeitung* got a world-class scoop just before Christmas by getting hold of Iraq's 12,000-page document concerning its relationship with weapons of mass destruction. The United Nations obeyed the US demand that it censor the report before it was given to members of the Security Council.

Swiftly excised were the corporations, mostly US, British and German, that supplied Iraq with nuclear, chemical, biological and missile technology prior to 1991. Such shipments, encouraged by the relevant governments, were illegal under the terms of solemn international treaties and laws. US corporations included Honeywell, SpectraPhysics, Rockwell, Hewlett Packard, DuPont, Eastman Kodak, Bechtel and others, twenty-four in all. In addition, the US Departments of Defense, Energy, Commerce and Agriculture were designated as suppliers.

A big story? You might think so. The European press covered it. Amy Goodman did a report on *Democracy Now!*, as did Indy-Media. I heard a good interview on CBC radio with the journalist who got the scoop. The London *Independent* ran a story on December 18. But the US corporate press? Nothing that I can find.

The Moral of Gore's Withdrawal

On December 15 Gore took himself out of the race for the Democratic nomination for 2004. Most of the coverage of Gore's withdrawal took a genteelly elegiac tone. Lacking was any sense of curiosity about what prompted him to withdraw.

After all, Gore was running way ahead of any rivals in polls of Democrats, and anyone claiming that Bush will be unbeatable need only look at the economic numbers, the increasing likelihood of a double-dip recession and what happened to the incumbent's dad in 1992, post his Iraq victory a year earlier. (We may safely discount the mushy stuff about Al being first and foremost a family man, under the rule that all politicians are family men who dream only of cozy evenings round the hearth, but that running for dogcatcher is way more fun.)

This fall Gore embarked on a carefully considered run to win renomination and recapture the left support that abandoned him for Nader in 2000. His well-written September speech in San Francisco staked out the ground: opposition to the manner of Bush's threats to attack Iraq; an onslaught on Bush/Ashcroft's assaults on civil liberties here in the Homeland. In the weeks that followed, during a long-planned book tour, Gore underlined this shift to the left, with calls for radical healthcare reform and populist noises about the economy and corporate crookery.

Now, what happens when a Democratic candidate for the presidential nomination campaigns as a peacenik? The mainstream press turns against that candidate and his money dries up.

Gore got poor reviews for his San Francisco speech, and political columnists began to note that funders were leery. Gore, you'll recall, spent much of his public life courting the financial support of hawkish American Jews who are now mostly urging Bush to knock over Saddam. His line on the war can't have been going down well with them. Just after a successful appearance on *Saturday Night Live*, Gore gave in to invincible forces and bowed out.

So where does that leave Ronnie Dugger? Here in *The Nation* a few weeks ago he urged Ralph Nader and all who supported him in 2000 to rally behind the Democratic presidential nominee in 2004 (who Dugger surely anticipated would be Gore). It leaves Dugger in the position of passionately urging loyalty among the left and greens to a party whose ownership by big money is so total that no candidate arguing serious economic reform or against war—even one with the safe record of Gore—can hope to survive.

I'm sorry to tell you, Ronnie. You can write about Bush's judicial appointments all you want, but it's not going to fly.

Them Racist Southerners

Don't you just love Northern liberals beating up on them racist Southerners? It seems one of the benchmarks of enlightenment is whether a politician voted for a Martin Luther King Day. Here's the *New York Times* editorializing on December 10 of 1982: "Why not a Martin Luther King Day?... Dr King, a humble man, would have objected to giving that much importance to any individual. Nor should he be given singular tribute if that demeans other historical black figures like Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois and Malcolm X." In other words, give one of them a holiday and they'll all be wanting one. The *Times* urged a statue of King in the Capitol, presumably in white marble, the better to blend in with the rest. ■

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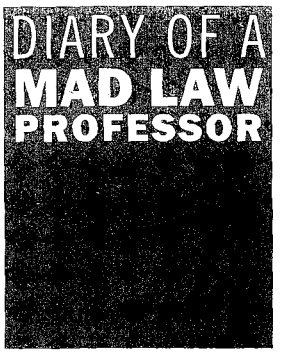
PATRICIA J. WILLIAMS

Strange Fruit



I have a friend who is the only black person living in his luxury cooperative building. A few years back, there was a get-to-know-your-neighbor party. After the party, as he was riding back upstairs on the elevator, a white woman who lived in the building told him that there was a new neighbor, a Mr. X, who was "incredibly racist." He told every hateful, supremacist joke in the book, she advised, and therefore "you should try to do something about him." What struck my friend, even more than the assignment to him of "doing something," was that he had seen her sitting with Mr. X for at least two hours during the party, nodding and listening but shocked, just shocked.

Two years later, Mr. X had worked his way up through the ranks of co-op board politics to become head of the committee interviewing prospective purchasers. It should be no surprise that by last September his candid attitudes toward minorities had earned the building a major discrimination suit. "Now it's everybody's problem," says my friend, shaking his head. "And everybody's shocked. Just shocked. They fall all over themselves apologizing to me—like I'm the plaintiff! But they're still fighting the case. They see no reason they should have to pay damages." If that weren't bad enough, my friend is finding himself used as the symbol of the co-op board's openness. "How could we be racist when we have a black person in the building?" the indignant Mr. X has asked, sounding for all the world like the Republican Party trying to resurrect itself as the born-again bastion of what it heretofore derided as the civil rights "establishment."

We have a troublesome tradition of apologizing a bit too quickly, a bit too easily, like sobered-up frat boys plying authorities with theatrical renditions of remorse. There's not a newspaper in the nation unadorned with elaborate expressions of contrition for one supreme mess or another. From Trent Lott to Cardinal Law, from Jerry Falwell to Michael Jackson—whether politicians, priests, athletes or financiers, they're sorry about slavery, sorry about running over Korean schoolchildren, sorry about raping minors, sorry about defrauding all those stockholders, sorry about accidentally bombing our Canadian allies, sorry about dangling that baby over the abyss. As Maureen Dowd said of Lott's sudden embrace of affirmative action (now that it's as dead as Martin Luther King), "For the love of Amos 'n' Andy, hasn't Mr. Lott punished the black man enough?"

Still, there are a few people from whom I'd like to hear an apologetic word or two: First, George W. Bush for the policies of his Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. New provisions, slipped by the press while reporters were off googling Lott's past, will allow religious institutions like Bob Jones University to receive federal funding for charitable missionary work, even if their hiring practices violate various civil rights laws. Second, the long list of law professors, including many "liberals," who supported Michael McConnell's recent nomination to the federal bench, despite McConnell's published stance that segregationist policies at religious institutions like Bob Jones University should not disqualify them from federal funding. Third, Bob Jones University, for abandoning its antimiscegenist stance only in the year 2000, and then only out of concern that it might harm George W. Bush's chances of being elected President; Bush campaigned there and was photographed seated in front of a giant mural of Jesus Christ, all but wrapped in the symbols of the Confederacy, a pose suspiciously like the closing scene of D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*. (And people wonder why 92 percent of blacks vote Democratic.)

But this is only the tip of a much larger iceberg that I have yet to see the media deal with—that is, the great historical power of the Christian Identity movement in this country. People are of course free to worship as they please, but if the American government has made it its business to monitor global religious extremism, we should be no less concerned about publicly funding domestic ideologies that an increasingly eloquent Lott, on the fourth—or was it the fifth?—try, called a "stain on our nation's soul." We should worry, in other words, about the legacy of Jim Crow's theology no less than its laws. It is no accident, after all, that a burning cross became the calling card for the Klan's deadly visitations. It is no accident that the Klan's robes and hoods look so similar to those used in the Spanish Inquisition. "Polygenesis"—the theory that God made blacks and whites in separate, unmixable batches—is at the root of Bob Jones's antimiscegenist beliefs. But it is also at the heart of many (certainly not all) creationists' resistance to scientific conclusions that man and "the lower orders" are related.

Let me digress now to the little matter of Clarence Thomas's "outburst" during arguments about a Virginia statute criminalizing cross-burning with an intent to threaten or intimidate. I'm no defender of Thomas, but I'm curious why so many in the media described his intervention as an "outburst." Did he shout? Did he flap his robes while dancing on the bench? Bang his gavel? Foam at the mouth? As far as I can tell he merely spoke, if at some length. That was unusual for him, and newsworthy, but does not an outburst make. Some analysts described the rest of the Justices as looking "stunned," or cowed in their respect for his sudden "moral authority." To others, Thomas was criticized for having used the "passionate" first person, for having "hijacked" the Court's objectivity or for "playing the race card." It was peculiar—you'd swear they were talking about Al Sharpton. I am struck by how understated was the last decade's media response to Lott's long history of racist remarks; and how overstated was the response to Thomas's straightforward description of cross-burning's association with racial violence.

I'm glad that Lott's statement provoked broad bipartisan soul-searching. But the very fact of Lott's election to majority leader in the first place demands a much more protracted commitment to self-examination than we've seen, among white liberals as well as those on the right. It cannot always be the job of your best black friend to act as eternal partypooper. ■

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IN COLD TYPE

AMY WILENTZ

Hot Topic

Topic magazine is a kaleidoscopic new British literary review, still in its infancy and edited by a bunch of precocious Cambridge graduate students. Not since **Granta** or the original **Grand Street** has there been such an original and absorbing new lit mag. Reading it is like letting your mind play; a totally pleasurable intellectual experience without the hip, stylish, babyish annoyances of the average new publication. As does *Granta* on occasion, *Topic* takes a subject ("War" in its first issue, "Fantasy" in its second) and gets two dozen or so writers and thinkers—sometimes just individuals with stories to tell—to come up with a turn on it. Some of the pieces are silly, but even those have something to offer—some amusing tidbit, an interesting attitude, a big literary voice, a deeply weird idiosyncrasy to reveal. Best of all, the pieces are bite-size and palatable. *Topic* is like a chocolate sampler for the mind.

Here's a run-through of the CVs of some contributors to the Fantasy issue: A poet, an anorexic writer, a classics professor, a graphic designer, a British knight, an English Civil War recreator, a professor of cognitive science, a Dutch photographer, a computer programmer; plus David Leavitt (the novelist), Steve McCurry (the photographer), a Ukrainian male prostitute and an American submarine-builder/restaurateur.

The least self-conscious and possibly best piece in the issue—although there is material that is much more serious—is the one from David Gibbons, the English Civil War re-enactor. Gibbons is a man who, on his own admission, "spends much of my spare time clad in archaic costume, speaking in the English of three hundred and fifty years ago and pretending, along with several thousand like minded characters, to be a soldier in the English Civil War." He works at the Torrington 1646 Civil War Heritage Centre in Devon, and plays "Robert de Gilbert, turncoat musketeer late of Lord Hopton's Western Army and now under the command of Lord Fairfax." The piece is written with a sense both of decency and of the ridiculous, and yet has an utter delight in absurdity and lack of real embarrassment that makes one think of John Cleese's best performances and characters. What a job this would be for Basil Fawlty.

Gerda Reith on "Gambling's Dark Secret" provides a brief journey into the world of compulsive gamblers (it's not reporting really, but an essay, as are many of these pieces), and she reminds one of Gogol's famous quote: All men are equal at cards. Marc Herman offers a "Letter from Java," a wonderful piece about the worlds of difference between cultures on the two sides of the Pacific. Of the financial deal he strikes with his Indonesian "guide" (whom he agrees to pay $10 a day), Herman writes: "He had no idea how little I was paying him; I had no idea how lavishly I was paying him. We walked off toward the Sultan's Palace in usefully mutual ignorance." Steve McCurry's photos of the Subcontinent and of the Middle East are very beautiful and respectably reproduced. There is so much more that is valuable, fun and a pleasure to read at a gulp here: a submarine searching for the Loch Ness monster (it goes nose down in the deep); Leavitt's essay on coincidence; "Vladislav's" memoir on being a male hooker in Prague; Jamie Campbell's narrative about pretending to be the writer Alex Garland; Julian Dibbell's amazing, trippy rumination on the former slave who first explored and mapped Mammoth Cave in Kentucky, and on how those maps and caves were translated into one of the first computer fantasy games. *Topic* is edgy without self-consciousness, meta without dopey complications. No magazine I've read in the past year has been anywhere near as consistently intelligent or fresh.

Shout It Out

■ Another fairly new publication, this one American and a relaunch, is **Shout**, whose motto is "insurgent thought + culture"—lots of hubris there. What's good about *Shout* is its mix of art-world reporting/criticism and, on the other hand, politics. One recent issue featured the ubiquitous Cory Booker on the cover with the headline "the first black president of the united states?" You might have thought we'd had enough of Booker, who, after all, lost his bid to become the new mayor of...Newark, a city of only 300,000, whose mayor is already black. Yet the piece, by Mat Johnson, has its merits. Johnson likes Booker but understands the Booker image-making machine. He cleverly points out that Booker, the shaven-headed Golden Boy of the article's title, resembles nothing as much as the Oscar statuette, and the whole piece is really about how Booker is a prized object of his own creating. And yet, and yet... "How many politicians do you know," asks Johnson, "who would be willing to move into the projects to prove a point during their campaign, and then stay there after they lose? Why would a fledgling politician pick the political beast that is Newark, New Jersey, if all he wanted was an easy, self-aggrandizing fight?" Good questions to be asked about Booker, a guy who does not seem to be taking the voters' no for an answer.

The same issue of *Shout* has a short piece on an artist who makes X-ray videos of people having sex, and a much too long piece (but with interesting photos) on the meaning of the Mohawk haircut over the years ("From 'Mo' to 'Faux': An Elegy to a Once Fierce 'Do," it is called). There is also a nice compendium of reasons to hate President Bush ("A Cheat Sheet for Why This Man is a Terrible President").

Unfortunately, the level of political discourse throughout much of the magazine is a bit juvenile. In the lead edit in the Booker issue, paraphrasing the actress Julia Roberts (who said "I cannot absorb living in a world where I have an Oscar for best actress and Denzel [Washington] doesn't have one for best actor"), *Shout*'s editor asks, "Why can we absorb living in a world where George Bush is president and Carl McCall isn't governor?" The level of bad logic, dumb politics and silly ideas that went into the writing of that sentence is so vast as to defy the imagination. One might just as well say, *tout court*, that one cannot absorb living in a world where Julia Roberts has an Oscar and George Bush is President.

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ARTICLES

THE POWER OF MUSIC

ANN POWERS

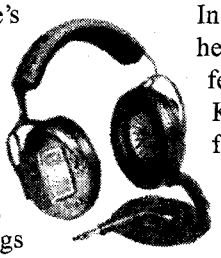
WITH

EDDIE VEDDER,
BOOTS RILEY,
AMY RAY,
CARRIE BROWNSTEIN
and TOM MORELLO

Midway through the peace rally in Seattle's Volunteer Park this past October, the stage was given over to a young man with a guitar. It was a big moment for this callow troubadour—certainly the largest crowd he'd ever faced, hungry for inspiration, ready for a new rallying cry. He strummed and took his shot. One more rendition of "The Times They Are A-Changin'." Somewhere, Bob Dylan, who long ago stopped his marching, groaned.

A few speakers later, another sound overtook the stage. It emanated from a motley hip-hop jam band, young men and women redolent of yesterday's patchouli, but bent on doing something at least partially new. The women traded acerbic raps above swirly guitar solos and some deft conga maneuvers. The result didn't hit as hard as Bob's old chestnut, but at least it took us into this century.

The venerable tradition of American protest music still generates heat on the rally circuit, as Dylan's constant reinvocation proves. Still, political music is marked by the same tension that always feeds pop music: the desire to connect to a legacy versus the impulse to try something new. Protest has gained voice across genres, linking Steve Earle's country polemics, Fugazi's anticorporate hardcore, the radical hip-hop of Mos Def and Talib Kweli. The activist songbook includes major contributions from punk and hip-hop as well as folk-rock. Benefit concerts and albums have become part of the star-making machinery. Bono, our Superliberal, trots the globe. Yet political songs rarely make it onto mainstream radio, and when it's time to focus on an anthem, too often what we all know is vintage 1968.



Dissent became all the more complicated after 9/11. The mainstream pop world responded to the World Trade Center attacks by waving a distinctly red-white-and-blue freak flag; the performances featured on various televised benefits exemplified the shock-induced patriotism of the moment. Eventually, dissent seemed like a possibility again, but with a few notable exceptions (the aforementioned Earle), most artists still display an uncertain step as they venture into the arena.

How can musicians respond to such confusing times? *The Nation* poses this question to five artists known for their outspoken views and powerful, activism-inspiring music. Boots Riley of the Oakland hip-hop duo the Coup may be best known for a terrible coincidence—the cover for his group's latest CD, *Party Music*, was recalled because the design, created long before September 11, showed Riley and DJ Pam the Funkstress blowing up the World Trade Center—but he has been an activist since his early teens and may be the most cogent political rapper working today. Eddie Vedder of Pearl Jam has worked for many causes, from the band's historic stand against the Ticketmaster monopoly to his tireless stumping for Ralph Nader in the 2000 election. Tom Morello, now of the band Audioslave, played guitar for Rage Against the Machine, the most visible leftist rock group of the 1990s. In the Indigo Girls and on her own, Amy Ray has established herself as a foremost advocate for Native American rights, feminist causes and environmentalism. And with Sleater-Kinney, Carrie Brownstein helped reshape the sound of feminist rock.

These interviews were conducted separately, but each artist expressed great camaraderie with the others participating. Perhaps there could be a benefit concert in this…

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DESERT ISLAND DISCS

Picture this: you're stranded on a desert island with nothing to comfort you but sand, sun and, miraculously, the solar-powered sound system that washed up with you. All of your CDs were lost at sea but, miraculously, a genie appears, promising to restore ten albums—but only ten—of your choice. Oh—and your selections will be published in America's oldest political weekly.

Such is the scenario we posed to the would-be castaways below, some of whom responded with enthusiasm, others with anxiety, many with a combination of both. The results were, as expected, revealing. —*The Editors*

THOMAS FRANK ★

Iggy & The Stooges *Raw Power* (Columbia)
Duke Ellington *The Immortal 1938 Year* (CBS)
Micronotz *Smash* (Fresh Sounds)
Embarrassment *Heyday: 1979–1983* (Bar None)
Half Japanese *Sing No Evil* (Drag City)
Ben Selvin *Dardanella* (Asy Living Era)
Jay McShann *Blues from Kansas City: Original Decca Recordings* (GRP)
Silkworm *Libertine* (El Records/Matador)
Artie Shaw *Vol. III of the Bluebird Anthology* (RCA)
Damon & Naomi *Playback Singers* (Sub Pop)

Thomas Frank, a founding editor of *The Baffler*, is the author, most recently, of *One Market, Under God* (Doubleday).

SANDRA CISNEROS ★

Chavela Vargas *De México y del Mundo* (Orfeon)
Lila Downs *La Sandunga* (AME)
Lola Beltrán *Serie Platino 20 Exitos* (BMG/RCA)
Various Artists *Los Gitanos Cantan a Federico García Lorca, Vol. 2* (Mercury)
Astor Piazzolla *Tango Zero Hour* (American Clavé)
Paquita la del Barrio *Grandes Exitos de Paquita la del Barrio* (Musart)
Joni Mitchell *Blue* (Warner Bros.)
Maria Callas *anything and everything*
Billie Holiday *ditto*
Agustín Lara *sung only by Toña la Negra*

Sandra Cisneros is the author, most recently, of the novel *Caramelo* (Knopf).

DOUG HENWOOD ★

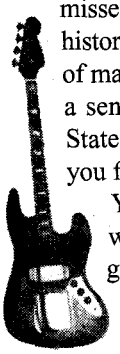
Patti Smith *Horses* (Arista)
David Bowie *Hunky Dory* (Virgin)
Gang of Four *Entertainment!* (EMI)
PJ Harvey *Is This Desire?* (Polygram)
Velvet Underground *Peel Slowly and See* (Polygram)
Sonic Youth *Daydream Nation* (Geffen)
Ludwig van Beethoven *The Late Piano Sonatas, Maurizio Pollini* (Polygram)
Dmitri Shostakovich *Complete String Quartets, Sorrel Quartet* (Chandos)
Chicks on Speed *Will Save Us All!* (Ete)
The Coup *Party Music* (Tommy Boy)

Doug Henwood, a *Nation* contributing editor, edits the *Left Business Observer*. His latest book, *A New Economy?*, is forthcoming from the New Press.

This is a strange moment for political music in rock. Big stars like Bruce Springsteen and Tom Petty are making music about issues, but as far as countercultural protest music goes, there's not much on the radar. You're all pretty explicit about your views—how's that going over on the road?

Boots Riley: Right after September 11 I got really pessimistic. Then we went out on tour. I wanted to go out there and make statements against the war [in Afghanistan]. We went all over—Iowa, Indiana, Florida, Alabama—and in every place the overwhelming majority of the crowd was in favor of my antiwar statement. On some dates we were headlining, so it was our crowd. On others, though, we were opening up for the X-Ecutioners, who have an MTV hit with Linkin Park. There was a big mixture of musical tastes at those shows, people coming from different political backgrounds, and we still got an overwhelming, positive response.

Eddie Vedder: As a touring musician, I would play thirty places in Europe in five weeks and not just pass through or see the sights but actually have an exchange with people. Everything I probably missed out on by not going to college as far as geography, history, world social studies and religion I feel like I've kind of made up for by just being alert on tour. That puts you in a sensitive place because you come back to the United States and you're happy to be back, but at the same time you feel like sharing what you've seen with other people. You want to say, you know, "I've seen some examples where things work a little better as far as healthcare, gun control, the modern-day prison system, the war on drugs"—you want to be able to share that and not feel like you're being unpatriotic or extra critical.



Tom, you've recently found a new way to get messages across on tour. Tell us about Axis of Justice, the organization you founded with Serj Tankian of System of a Down.

Tom Morello: Axis of Justice feels like the most concrete political event that I've been involved in. It's an installation that will go out on band's tours, a tent that brings together representatives from various activist groups to exchange information with concertgoers. Having been in progressively minded bands, I know that it's not easy to help build a bridge between your audience and the causes you support. Axis builds that bridge. It essentially works as a referral service. When we play in your hometown we bring the installation and it's divided by subgroupings, so whether you are personally a victim of physical or sexual abuse, or whether you are interested in labor issues and globalization, or antiracism or peace issues and the war with Iraq, you will be able that night to belong to an organization or meet with others who are interested in forming one.

The response on the Ozzfest tour was unbelievable. These are metal kids who are often disparaged as being apolitical or right wing. Now, when we send Axis out on tours, it can hopefully be a very unifying, galvanizing force. We offer it to artists to take out, free of charge.

Ann Powers is a senior curator at Experience Music Project in Seattle. The author of Weird Like Us: My Bohemian America *(Simon & Schuster), she has written extensively for the* New York Times *and most major music publications.*

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Many of you have balanced music and activism by somewhat separating the two. Is it just too hard to actually integrate them?

Riley: For me it's always been a struggle. Either I'm really into the organizing or I'm really into the music. As I've been going I've been able to figure out ways to even it out a little more. But the way the industry is set up, you have to record an album and then promote it; you can't just be like "we got these two cool songs, let's put them out." That's just not the way that the market is set up. It can become alienating. Then, if I do get involved with an organization or a campaign, I'm able to maybe bring some more exposure to it, but that exposure isn't necessarily helpful to building the organization. Because what I do is hip-hop and that's sexy, and my role is played up to be more than it is. But really, to organize you have to be able to build leadership in each other.

Eddie, when you were working with Ralph Nader, you basically did that as a private citizen, right? A volunteer?

Vedder: Well, a private citizen with a guitar. I went down to [the first rally he attended, in Seattle 2000] to just kind of watch. But I've been following Ralph for such a long time. When I was a kid it seemed like there were civic heroes, growing up in a part of Chicago where two-thirds of the school was African-American and Martin Luther King was as big as Michael Jordan. Before I was a teenager, I knew Ralph Nader's name and knew him as kind of a civic hero. You know, to have someone who's such a great candidate and such a legitimate candidate as far as his record compared to a bumbling fool from Texas—I think it's essential that we get him in the debates.

Playing a benefit for a cause is one of the main ways musicians do politics. At this point, though, the rock benefit has become something of a cliché. Do you think benefits have lost their effectiveness?

Amy Ray: I think it's always valuable to do benefits, but I think it's the type of benefit you do that establishes what your value is. We [the Indigo Girls] do very hands-on benefits—we'll do a three-week tour and half of it's actually in the communities where we're learning where the money's going and we're doing cultural exchange. It doesn't raise a million dollars, it raises $100,000. But it also raises a lot of awareness and we learn more about what's actually going on.

With big benefits, there's just this tendency for the show to become a parody of itself. Artists are there and they don't even know why. They're there because their manager told them it was the hip thing to do.

Morello: I'd have to say, there's nothing wrong with a benefit concert. Rock and roll generates cash, and whether that money is used to feed starving Ethiopians or whether it's used to open a clinic somewhere, that's a better purpose than new rims on the Bentley for the bass player. I'll tell you one thing, though—what does make me chafe is whenever there is a benefit concert, there are always these accusations hurled around that these artists are just doing it for publicity. Let me tell you, there's better ways to get publicity.

Ray: Touring with the Butchies [the all-female punk band that played with Ray on her solo album, *Stag*] renewed my sense of the importance of doing smaller actions. I learned that I don't need to worry whether I can get Red Hot Chili Peppers to come to an Honor the Earth benefit. Because I can get Girls Against Boys and the Butchies and we can go play the 9:30 club [in Washington, DC] and it just builds. There's going to be fifty kids there that are going to say wow, this is cool, let's plan our own benefit. And that's the point.

Is it easy to make alliances with other politically minded artists?

Ray: I think there's a thing in artist activism where there's the hip activists and then the ones that are just, like, not hip. And I think we've always sort of been in the not-hip category, because we champion these causes that are like, Indians, what's that? We don't do the big stuff, we don't get asked to. We would probably have done something like a Free Tibet benefit if we were asked. It gets discouraging because you want to feel like you can call those people that are in that club, which we've done a lot, and get them to help you out. Some do. Eddie Vedder has helped us a lot.

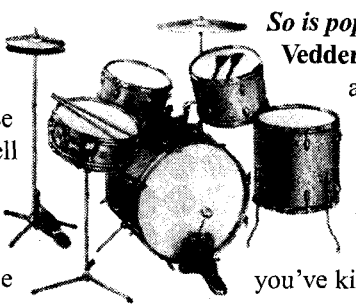
Riley: For a long time it was weird for me because music people I knew had very little in agreement with what I was philosophically. Around 1999 I met dead prez, and there was this big similarity.

They're doing what you're doing, on the East Coast.

Riley: There are a lot of people out there doing cool work. I went to South Africa with Talib Kweli and the Roots for a couple of weeks. And even a lot of the groups that aren't called political or revolutionary have a lot more to say than what you hear on the singles. Like [popular Southern rapper] Trick Daddy has a lot of stuff on his album that really speaks to things. The way you tell a story is the politics of it, and he's telling a story, and a lot of it comes from the standpoint that this system is corrupt. [In songs like "Run Nigga" and "Bricks & Marijuana," Trick Daddy uses the landscape of "thug life" to confront inner-city inequities.] I would suspect he probably doesn't put those songs out as videos. Not because he thinks people won't be into it, but because he thinks the programmers won't play it.

That brings up another conundrum concerning politics and pop. Many people think popular music, as part of the multinational entertainment industry, is part of the problem.

Morello: Absolutely. And frankly, when they write the history of our time, I think that's not going to be perceived as an accident. It's a crucial part of rolling the wet blanket over us. People should be erecting barricades in the streets for what's going on. Thirty million Americans under the poverty line. Forty million without healthcare. And people are just psyched about Christina Aguilera's short shorts.



So is pop just an opiate, or what?

Vedder: If people want to go for the guns and booze aspect of rock and roll, then it's there. And it should be. One of the best ways to deal with some problems every once in a while is to dance all over them. At the end of the day, you've done all your thinking—maybe you voted that day or you held a sign up, and you've talked with your friend and you've kind of got as far as you could get with the issues.

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ELLEN WILLIS ★

Velvet Underground Golden Archive Series (MGM)
Bob Dylan Blonde on Blonde (Columbia)
Bessie Smith The Bessie Smith Story Vol. 4 (Columbia)
Otis Redding The Very Best of Otis Redding (Atlantic)
John Fahey Vol. 1: Blind Joe Death (Takoma)
Lotte Lenya et al. The Threepenny Opera (MGM/Capriccio)
Tupac Shakur 2Pac–Greatest Hits (Interscope)
Marianne Faithfull Broken English (Island)
Various Artists Sopranos: Peppers & Eggs (Music from HBO Original Series) (Sony)
The Rolling Stones Exile on Main Street (Virgin)

Ellen Willis directs the cultural reporting and criticism program at New York University. Her latest book is *Don't Think, Smile! Notes on a Decade of Denial* (Beacon).

DAVID CORN ★

The Clash London Calling (Epic)
Bob Dylan/The Band The Basement Tapes (bootleg)
Bruce Springsteen Nebraska (Columbia)
Sam Cooke The Man and His Music (RCA)
Uncle Tupelo March 16–20, 1992 (Rockville)
Velvet Underground Live 1969 (Polygram)
The Rolling Stones Exile on Main Street (Virgin)
Tom Waits Small Change (Elektra/Asylum)
Patti Smith Horses (Arista)
Miles Davis Kind of Blue (Columbia)

David Corn is *The Nation*'s Washington editor.

EDWIDGE DANTICAT ★

Boukman Eksperyans Revolution (Lightyear)
Wyclef Jean Masquerade (Sony)
Cesaria Evora Very Best of Cesaria Evora (RCA)
India.Arie Voyage to India (Universal)
Salif Keita Moffou (Universal)
Caetano Veloso Live in Bahia (Nonesuch)
Cassandra Wilson Belly of the Sun (Blue Note)
Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir Be Glad (Word Entertainment)
Lauryn Hill MTV Unplugged No. 2.0 (Sony)
The Classical Jazz Quartet Plays Bach (Vertical Jazz)

Edwidge Danticat's most recent books are *After the Dance: A Walk Through Carnival in Jacmel, Haiti* (Crown) and *Behind the Mountains* (Orchard), a young adult novel.

JOHN NICHOLS ★

Miles Davis In a Silent Way (Sony)
Phil Ochs Gunfight at Carnegie Hall (A&M)
Laura Nyro Christmas and the Beads of Sweat (Sony)
Al Green Call Me (Capitol)
Kevin Ayers/John Cale/Nico/Brian Eno June 1, 1974 (Polygram Int'l)
Patti Smith Horses (Arista)
Linton Kwesi Johnson Dread Beat an' Blood (Caroline)
Tom Robinson Band Power in the Darkness (BMG/Razor & Tie)
Pulp We Love Life (Sanctuary)
Nicola Conte Jet Sounds Revisited (Esl Music)

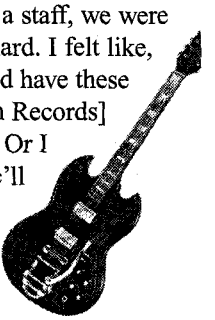
John Nichols is *The Nation*'s Washington correspondent.

You're not going to be able to do anything about it at 1 in the morning. So you're splitting a twelve-pack with a friend, so what do you do now? You rock out. There's a time and a place for everything.

Anticorporate activism is a big part of the left these days, and it's an issue on the music scene too. Most of you are on major labels. How do you reconcile participating in a multinational corporate entertainment system?

Morello: Rage Against the Machine was able to deliver 15 million subversive pieces of plastic across the globe. When we were being courted by different record labels, our only condition was that we have complete artistic control over every facet of our career in perpetuity. They put that in writing, we said fantastic.

Ray: When Indigo Girls signed [with Epic], that was my one concession to hypocrisy. I just said OK, I'm going to do this, because Emily [Saliers, the duo's other half] wanted to, for one thing, and I wanted to because I was tired. We didn't have a staff, we were just doing everything for ourselves and it was hard. I felt like, this is my choice: I can either sign to a major and have these resources and have my own indie label [Daemon Records] and put out five records a year by other people. Or I can talk Emily into staying independent and we'll spend all of our time on our own career, and we won't ever get to do anything else with anybody else. The choice was obvious.



But I'll be very excited when this record deal is over. I would never sign again with a major label, because I feel like it's run its course. Major labels right now are pretty obsolete for artists like us.

There's a lot of upheaval in the music industry right now, and a lot of activism. What do you think of organizations working to better define artists' rights in the digital age? In Washington, there's the Future of Music Coalition, a think tank that's just released an important study on the state of radio and does work on issues involving artists' rights and the Internet. In California, Don Henley co-founded the Recording Artists' Coalition to champion artists' rights in Congress and beyond. Do you think the work these groups are doing is important?

Morello: One ambition of mine is to unionize rockers and rappers. There is no collective bargaining whatsoever. I belong to the musicians' union, and I'll tell you, if you are a symphony member, if you can play oboe with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, they'll make sure you get your scale. If you are in a fledgling hip-hop band and someone puts a contract down on the hood of their Bentley, there's no one you can go to.

The Recording Artists' Coalition is a good step in that direction, but one of my qualms about it is that the majority of the people on the board of directors are not even artists.

Ray: I'm a big supporter of the Future of Music Coalition, because they're trying to educate people about the way the machine works. You have to know that before you can accomplish your art within the framework of consumerism. It also helps you accomplish your activism better because if you're smart about the way this machine works, you're going to understand the way other corporate structures work and you'll understand how to approach them.

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Carrie, Sleater-Kinney has stayed on a small independent label, Kill Rock Stars, and that's a big part of the band's identity.

Carrie Brownstein: I think the model that we embody illustrates what you can do by taking a different route from the completely corporate one. You can hold on to your ideals and still support yourself. But I totally understand why people sign to a major label. So many bands struggle in obscurity or struggle on an indie label for years and years. It's not a black and white issue, so even though I've said it's a political or business model, I don't really think of it as an instruction manual. It's something that has worked for us and we have been lucky.

Boots, the Coup has been on major and independent labels. Any difference?

Riley: My main principle is getting the idea out there. Because of my politics, I don't necessarily think that the independent capitalist is that much better than the multinational capitalist; it's just that the independent capitalist hasn't grown as big yet. I've been on an indie label, and the only difference was they had less money to work with. But there is a different line that I won't go across—opportunities put in front of our faces to make a lot of money.

Like what?

Riley: *Interview* magazine had this thing going on. I didn't find out what the figure was but it involved money. They'd do a whole editorial on us and they'd have this thing with Levi's where on the other side of the page we'd wear Levi's. That was just this past year. Those types of things are even extra weird for me because I'm like, "Why do they want us?" The only reason is to say, "We got them all now!" [Editor's Note: *Interview* acknowledges approaching the Coup for a Levi's ad but denies any editorial component.]

Vedder: I know that when I heard the Buzzcocks on a Toyota ad, I wasn't particularly upset. I mean, the initial reaction was shock; at the same time, it's a good song and I know they haven't sold a million records. But I feel like maybe a band like the Counting Crows in a Coke commercial, they should know that Coke's been marketing to children and striking deals with the schools to get pop machines and advertising in the schools. I just wouldn't want to participate in anything like that.

Brownstein: There are ways of being savvy about dealing with corporations and about making decisions that you feel good about. Homegrocer.com asked Sam [Coomes, who plays in the duo Quasi with Sleater-Kinney drummer Janet Weiss] for a song he wrote ["Would You Like to Have Something to Eat?"]. He did give them the song and they were going to pay him a large sum of money and he said, "OK, but you have to match that and I'm donating it to a food bank in Portland."

I did a Priceline commercial, you know.

Right, right, with William Shatner, I remember it.

Brownstein: It was just me. I was like, "Yeah, I'll do that commercial, just for fun." I would not have had the band do it and we would not have given a song to them. There's definitely kind of a line in my head that artistically, in terms of the band and our music, I just would not cross. I would rather sign to a major label than ever do an ad for McDonald's.

Rock and roll is all about lifestyle, in many people's minds. Do you believe lifestyle can be a form of activism?

Brownstein: A lot of the political choices I make are in my personal life—in the way that I vote or live or consume or not consume. And I think for us the music has always come first, and activism comes second, at least as a band. We use our music as our activism, you know. If those can somehow be tied together, all the better for us.

Ray: As a musician, there's the way you run your organization. How many women do you hire? Do you hire people who are of different colors and different sexualities? Do you use recycled paper, do you talk the record label into using recycled paper? Dave Matthews has that ticket service now where you can get tickets online instead of using Ticketmaster. And he's offering it to other artists and we go through that too. Believe me, there's not many people that could talk promoters into offering up a certain number of seats in their venues that were not Ticketmaster seats. He had that power and he did it, and that's killer.

What would you say to critics who say you're preaching to the converted?

Riley: How I normally work is, I assume that you agree with me. I don't think the problem starts with you. I think that makes my music less preachy and it also allows me to just talk about the regular things I go through.

Ray: The Indigo Girls' audience is not necessarily all left, that's the thing. We have a lot of conservative people in our audience that are socially liberal, open to tolerance for different religions or different sexuality but they're not necessarily voting Democrat or Green. We still get mail from people who are mad about our stance on abortion. When we started we had so many of what appeared to be Christian references in our music and they really weren't. And so there's still people, the abortion thing really bugs them. I'm glad that we have that community that's willing to come and maybe their minds get opened up in some way.

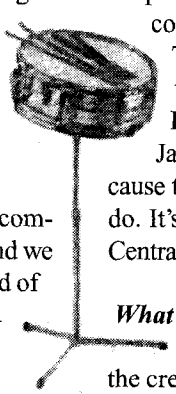
You're all young enough to have missed the counterculture of the 1960s. Is it a shadow over you? How do you view that time now? How are you connected or disconnected to it?

Vedder: The soundtrack for peace has definitely fallen into the hands of—it's just become the Beatles and John Lennon and Dylan, which is quite a legacy on top of everything else they did musically. That's why it's nice to hear a song like Patti Smith's "People Have the Power," to keep it more current. But you know, at the same time, I was trying to write a little something for Ralph Nader when I played at a few different rallies and I was coming up with a few things and then I stumbled upon "The Times They Are A-Changin'" and it really was as relevant today as it had ever been.

Ray: Actually, our peers have been more like the old guard: Jackson Browne, Bonnie Raitt, David Crosby. It's been because the style of activism we're doing is more the style that they do. It's very hands on. You know, Jackson, when he worked on Central American issues he was *down* in Central America.

What about the rest of you? Who are your peers?

Morello: I think that Living Colour doesn't get nearly the credit that is due to them as an all-black commercially suc-



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KATHA POLLITT ★

Ralph Stanley Saturday Night & Sunday Morning (Freeland)
Doc Watson On Praying Ground (Sugarhill)
Alison Krauss and The Cox Family I Know Who Holds Tomorrow (Rounder/Pgd)
The Nashville Bluegrass Band To Be His Child (Rounder)
Bob Dylan World Gone Wrong (Sony)
Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau Die Winterreise (Schubert) (Polygram)
Thomas Hampson & Samuel Ramey No Tenors Allowed (Elektra/Asylum)
Mozart Don Giovanni, *Conductor: Josef Krip* (London)
Mozart Cosi Fan Tutte, *Conductor: Karl Böhm* (Angel)
Cesaria Evora São Vincente (Windham Hill)

Katha Pollitt is a columnist for The Nation.

ERIC ALTERMAN ★

Bruce Springsteen You Can Trust Your Car to the Man Who Wears the Star: Live at The Main Point, 1975 (bootleg)
Bob Dylan Biograph (Sony/Columbia)
The Beatles The White Album (Capitol)
The Rolling Stones Forty Licks (Virgin)
Miles Davis/John Coltrane The Complete Columbia Recordings, 1955–1961 (Sony)
Duke Ellington The Blanton-Webster Band (RCA)
Frank Sinatra The Complete Capitol Singles Collection (Capitol)
Hank Williams The Complete Hank Williams (Polygram)
Elvis Presley The Complete 50's Masters (RCA)
Various Artists Beg, Scream and Shout! The Big Oh! Box of Sixties Soul (Rhino)

Eric Alterman is a columnist for The Nation.

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL

Aretha Franklin The Very Best of Aretha Franklin, Vol. 1 (Rhino)
Al Green Greatest Hits (Hi Records)
Stevie Wonder Song Review: A Greatest Hits Collection (Motown)
Lucinda Williams Car Wheels on a Gravel Road (Polygram)
Carole King Tapestry (Epic/Ode)
Van Morrison The Best of Van Morrison (Polygram)
Portishead Dummy (Polygram)
Tom Waits The Early Years, Vol. 2 (Manifesto)
Bob Dylan Bootleg Series Vol. 3 (Sony)
Bulat Okudzhava Collected Songs (Solyd)

Katrina vanden Heuvel is editor of The Nation.

★

cessful hard-rock band. I owe them an enormous debt of gratitude, cause until them you had to play Jimi Hendrix cover songs at kegger parties, and that was sort of the ceiling, the black ceiling, for a guy like me. And metal kids who were all white could never like hip-hop. Those walls have definitely tumbled. Which paved the way for a band like Rage Against the Machine, which has a multiethnic audience and delivers a political message to fans of Metallica and fans of A Tribe Called Quest.

Brownstein: Mr. Lady, the Butchies' label, is a women-run and very overtly feminist label that has made a large effort not only to put out interesting, good, political music but also embodies and disseminates many leftist and radical and feminist ideas as a label. And the artists are different and don't follow one kind of political platform. Le Tigre we certainly feel akin to, and Sara Dougher. And then Pearl Jam, specifically I mean Eddie Vedder, who we know. In terms of some of our goals, to use music as a means of really communicating and connecting with people, I definitely feel a kinship with him. And then the Coup—I have only been listening to them for the last year, but it totally floored me when I heard their record.

Vedder: For me it's more people like Medea Benjamin [the founder of Global Exchange]. I did see Bruce Springsteen in Chicago, and he really eloquently mentioned a couple things at the end of the show about not forgetting that civil rights is still an issue and that as American citizens we have a right to them as well, and we have a right to participate in an open and honest debate about whether or not we're going to send Americans overseas to fight a war.

What's necessary for the politically aware musician now?

Brownstein: Maybe we need to step outside our houses and go talk to our neighbors and see what they're doing. Go to meetings or actually take a little bit more of a role in our city and state politics. I at least feel that way. It's not just about the personal choices I make; they might make me feel better but may not necessarily be enough right now. That same philosophy makes me want to team up with other like-minded bands that aren't necessarily from the independent community, may not even necessarily be in Portland. I've talked to members of the Coup about playing a show with them and Steve Earle. We've talked about doing some touring with Pearl Jam next year. Establishing connections with people that you feel akin to is really important right now.

Here's the million-dollar question. If you could get one message out to your fans right now, what would it be?

Brownstein: Oh my God, that's so much responsibility! One message to the people. It just makes you want to quote something horrible. Don't stop thinkin' about tomorrow, people! No, Clinton already used that. I guess I would say that your imagination is a vital tool, and so many things in our culture are there to take the place of your imagination. So have faith in new ideas.

Ray: What I would say is, there is a connection between nuclear waste, the war in Iraq, and the fact that people need to drive cars that get better mileage. And I hope everybody's going to get really active about this war.

Morello: You are a historical agent. History is not something that has happened in the past and that is made up of names and

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dates and places of kings and generals, history is what you make in your home, in your place of work, in the streets, in your community and in the world and your actions—your actions or your inaction is directly affecting the fate of the world that you live in and should be treated with that gravity.

Vedder: I think everyone should feel that there's power in gathering together and being out in the street. On the day of the Westlake Center peace protest in Seattle, I was out of town. I talked to Tim Robbins, and he and Susan had been down to Central Park that morning and he said it was beautiful, maybe 40,000 people out there. I saw about three seconds of that on CNN. It was Sunday morning, and I'd watched *This Week* and *Face the Nation* and I was about ready to take a hammer to my head. So it's such a positive thing to be out there and feel active. It's like Christmas in a way. It feels good.

Riley: My message? You can do it too. ★

'STAKES IS HIGH'

Conscious Rap, Neosoul and the Hip-Hop Generation

by JEFF CHANG

Fifteen years ago, rappers like Public Enemy, KRS-One and Queen Latifah were received as heralds of a new movement. Musicians—who, like all artists, always tend to handle the question "What's going on?" much better than "What is to be done?"—had never been called upon to do so much for their generation; Thelonious Monk, Aretha Franklin and Stevie Wonder were never asked to stand in for Thurgood Marshall, Fannie Lou Hamer or Stokely Carmichael. But the gains of the civil rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s were being rolled back. Youths were as fed up with black leadership as they were with white supremacy. Politics had failed. Culture was to become the hip-hop generation's battlefield, and "political rap" was to be its weapon.

Today, the most cursory glance at the Billboard charts or video shows on Viacom-owned MTV and BET suggests rap has been given over to cocaine-cooking, cartoon-watching, Rakim-quoting, gold-rims-coveting, death-worshiping young 'uns. One might even ask whether rap has abandoned the revolution.

Indeed, as the central marker of urban youth of color style and authenticity, rap music has become the key to the niching of youth culture. The "hip-hop lifestyle" is now available for purchase in every suburban mall. "Political rap" has been repackaged by record companies as merely "conscious," retooled for a smaller niche as an alternative. Instead of drinking Alizé, you drink Sprite. Instead of Versace, you wear Ecko. Instead of Jay-Z, you listen to the Roots. Teen rap, party rap, gangsta rap, political rap—tags that were once a mere music critic's game—are literally serious business.

"Once you put a prefix on an MC's name, that's a death trap," says Talib Kweli, the gifted Brooklyn-born rapper who disdains being called "conscious." Clearly his music expresses a well-defined politics; his rhymes draw from the same well of protest that nourished the Last Poets, the Watts Prophets and the Black Arts stalwarts he cites as influences. But he argues that marketing labels close his audience's minds to the possibilities of his art. When Kweli unveiled a song called "Gun Music," some fans grumbled. (No "conscious" rapper would stoop to rapping about guns, they reasoned, closing their ears even as Kweli delivered a complicated critique of street-arms fetishism.) At the same time, Kweli worries that being pigeonholed as political will prevent him from being promoted to mass audiences. Indeed, to be a "political rapper" in the music industry these days is to be condemned to preach to a very small choir.

"Political rap" was actually something of an invention. The Bronx community-center dances and block parties where hip-hop began in the early 1970s were not demonstrations for justice, they were celebrations of survival. Hip-hop culture simply reflected what the people wanted and needed—escape. Rappers bragged about living the brand-name high life because they didn't; they boasted about getting headlines in the *New York Post* because they couldn't. Then, during the burning summer of the first Reagan recession, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five released "The Message," a dirge (by the standards of the day) that seethed against the everyday violence of disinvestment. Flash was certain the record, which was actually an A&R-pushed concoction by Duke Bootee and Melle Mel, would flop; it was too slow and too depressing to rock a party. But Sugar Hill Records released the song as a single over his objections, and "The Message" struck the zeitgeist like a bull's-eye. Liberal soul and rock critics, who had been waiting for exactly this kind of statement from urban America, championed it. Millions of listeners made it the third platinum rap single.

Through the mid-1980s, Melle Mel, Afrika Bambaataa and Soul Sonic Force, Run-DMC and others took up the role of the young black lumpenrapper opposition, weighing in on topics like racism, nuclear proliferation and apartheid. And just as the first Bush stepped into office, a new generation began to articulate a distinctly post–civil rights stance. Led by Public Enemy, rappers like Paris, Ice-T, X-Clan, Poor Righteous Teachers and Brand Nubian displayed the Black Panther Party's media savvy and the Minister Louis Farrakhan's nationalist rage. Politics were as explicit as Tipper Gore's advisory stickers. As the Gulf War progressed, Paris's "Bush Killa" imagined a Black Power assassination of Bush the Elder while rapping, "Iraq never called me 'nigger.'" (Last year, he returned to cut an MP3-only critique of the war on Afghanistan, "What Would You Do?") Rappers' growing confidence with word, sound and power was reflected in more slippery and subtle music, buttered with Afrodiasporic and polycultural flavor.

Many of these artists had emerged from vibrant protest movements—New York City's resurgent Black Power move-

Jeff Chang's political and cultural history, Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation, *will be published by St. Martin's Press this year.*

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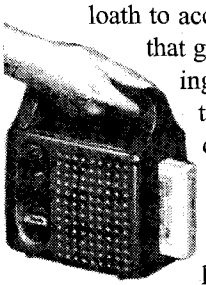
ment; the swelling campus antiapartheid/multiculturalism/affirmative action movement; local anti–police brutality movements. In each of these, representation was the cry and the media were a target. Rap "edutainment" came out of the convergence of two very different desires: the need for political empowerment and the need to be empowered by images of truth. On 1990's "Can I Kick It?," A Tribe Called Quest's Phife Dawg captured the mood of his audience sweetly and precisely: "Mr. Dinkins, will you please be our mayor?" But while Mayor Dinkins's career quickly hit a tailspin, hip-hop rose by making blackness—even radical blackness—the worldwide trading currency of cultural cool.

In the new global entertainment industry of the 1990s, rap became a hot commodity. But even as the marketing dollars flowed into youth of color communities, major labels searched for ways to capture the authenticity without the militancy. Stakes was high, as De La Soul famously put it in 1996, and labels were loath to accept such disruptions on their investments as those that greeted Ice-T and Body Count's "Cop Killer" during the '92 election season. Rhymers kicking sordid tales from the drug wars were no longer journalists or fictionists, ironists or moralists. They were purveyors of a new lifestyle, ghetto cool with all of the products but none of the risk or rage. After Dr. Dre's pivotal 1992 album, *The Chronic*, in which a millennial, ghettocentric Phil Spector stormed the pop charts with a postrebellion gangsta party that brought together Crip-walking with Tanqueray-sipping, the roughnecks, hustlers and riders took the stage from the rap revolutionaries, backed by the substantial capital of a quickly consolidating music industry.



Rap music today reflects the paradoxical position of the hip-hop generation. If measured by the volume of products created by and sold to them, it may appear that youth of color have never been more central to global popular culture. Rap is now a $1.6 billion engine that drives the entire music industry and flexes its muscle across all entertainment platforms. Along with its music, Jay-Z's not-so-ironically named Roc-A-Fella company peddles branded movies, clothing and vodka. Hip-hop, some academics assert, is hegemonic. But as the social turmoil described by many contemporary rappers demonstrates, this generation of youth of color is as alienated and downpressed as any ever has been. And the act of tying music to lifestyle—as synergy-seeking media companies have effectively done—has distorted what marketers call the "aspirational" aspects of hip-hop while marginalizing its powers of protest.

Yet the politics have not disappeared from popular rap. Some of the most stunning hits in recent years—DMX's "Who We Be," Trick Daddy's "I'm a Thug," Scarface's "On My Block"—have found large audiences by making whole the hip-hop generation's cliché of "keeping it real," being true to one's roots of struggle. The video for Nappy Roots' brilliant "Po' Folks" depicts an expansive vision of rural Kentucky—black and white, young and old together, living like "everything's gon' be OK." Scarface's ghettocentric "On My Block" discards any pretense at apology. "We've probably done it all, fa' sheezy," he raps. "I'll never leave my block, my niggas need me." For some critics, usually older and often black, such sentiments seem dangerously close to pathological, hymns to debauchery and justifications for thuggery. But the hip-hop generation recognizes them as anthems of purpose, manifestoes that describe their time and place the same way that Public Enemy's did. Most of all, these songs and their audiences say, we are survivors and we will never forget that.

The "conscious rap" and "neosoul" genres take up where 1970s soul experimentalists like Marvin Gaye and Curtis Mayfield left off. At their best, they are black-to-the-future havens of experimentation that combine a grandiose view of pop music's powers, an earnest hope for a better world and a jaded insider's disdain for rote commercialism. Crews like Blackalicious, the Coup, Jurassic 5, Zion I and dead prez have attained modest success by offering visions of twenty-first-century blackness—hypertextual rhymes, stuttering rhythms and lush sounds rooted in a deep understanding of African-American cultural production and ready-made for a polycultural future. The Roots' album *Phrenology* stretches hip-hop's all-embracing method—the conviction that "every music is hip-hop" and ready to be absorbed—to draw from a palette as wide as Jill Scott, Bad Brains, James Blood Ulmer and the Cold Crush Brothers. Common's *Electric Circus* takes cues from Prince and Sly Stone in reimagining the hip-hop concept album.

Tensions often spring from the compromises inherent in being given the budget to build a statement while being forced to negotiate the major label's Pavlovian pop labyrinth, and others have left the system to, as Digital Underground once famously put it, do what they like, albeit for much smaller audiences. Public Enemy has gone to the Internet and to indies in order, they say, to "give the peeps what they need," not what they think they want. After spending more than a decade in unsuccessful efforts with major labels, rapper Michael Franti now records on his own Boo Boo Wax imprint. It's hard to imagine his latest effort, "Bomb Da World"—whose chorus goes, "You can bomb the world to pieces, but you can't bomb it into peace"—passing muster in the boardrooms. Berkeley-based rapper Mr. Lif cut two of the most funky and politically challenging records of the year, the *Emergency Rations* EP and *I Phantom* LP, for the indie Definitive Jux. The EP's clever conceit—that the rapper has literally "gone underground" to escape angry Feds—is easily the wittiest, most danceable critique yet of the USA Patriot Act.

> 'WE GAVE THE YOUTH ALL THE ANGER BUT YET WE AIN'T TAUGHT THEM HOW TO EXPRESS IT. AND SO IT'S DANGEROUS' —Talib Kweli

Hip-hop has been roundly condemned within and without for its sexist, misogynistic tendencies, but it has also created room for artists like Me'shell N'degeocello, Mystic, Lauryn Hill, Erykah Badu, Jill Scott, Goapele and Angie Stone to mix up and transform both rap and r&b. "Neosoul" has been

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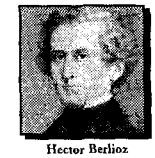
Hector Berlioz

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especially attractive to women and post–young 'uns. Its hip-hop feminist critique came into sharp relief last year. After years of flying high, rap sales crashed by 15 percent, leading an industry-wide plunge. But multiplatinum newcomers Alicia Keys and India.Arie were garlanded with a bevy of Grammy nominations. Keys and Arie celebrated "a woman's worth" and were frankly critical of male irresponsibility. India.Arie's breakout hit "Video"—in which she sang, "I'm not the average girl from your video"—stole the music that had once been sampled for a rap ode to oral sex called "Put It in Your Mouth."

Hip-hop feminism has been articulated by Joan Morgan as a kind of loyal but vocal, highly principled opposition to black (and brown and yellow) male übermasculinity. In the same way, neosoul dissects the attitudes and ideals projected in the hip-hop mainstream. Me'shell N'degeocello's compelling *Cookie: The Anthropological Mixtape* opens with the line, "You sell your soul like you sell a piece of ass." The most commanding of the neosoul artists, Jill Scott, imagines reconciliation, no longer having to love hip-hop from a distance. On "Love Rain" she sings of meeting a new man: "Talked about Moses and Mumia, reparations, blue colors, memories of shell-top Adidas, he was fresh like summer peaches." But the relationship ends badly, "All you did was make a mockery of somethin' so incredibly beautiful. I honestly did love you so."

Neosoul personalizes struggles, but the approach has its limitations. India.Arie's *Voyage to India*, for instance, suffers from reducing black radical conviction to self-affirmation mantra. At the same time, the genre mirrors a deeply held conviction of the hip-hop generation: Revolution does not come first from mass organizations and marching in the streets, but through knowledge of self and personal transformation. "Back in the '60s, there was a big push for black senators and politicians, and now we have more than we ever had before, but our communities are so much worse," says Talib Kweli. "A lot of people died for us to vote, I'm aware of that history, but these politicians are not in touch with people at all. Politics is not the truth to me, it's an illusion." For a generation that has made a defensive virtue of keeping it real, the biggest obstacle to societal change may simply be the act of imagining it.

These are the kinds of paradoxes the silver-tongued Kweli grapples with on his second solo album, *Quality*, as masterful a summation of the hip-hop generation's ambivalent rage as Morgan's book, *When Chickenheads Come to Roost*. On one of his early songs, Kweli synthesized 1960s militancy and 1990s millenarianism in a phrase, rapping about the need for "knowledge of self-determination." At one point on the Nina Simone–flavored "Get By," he sees the distance his generation still needs to cover: "We're survivalists turned to consumers." Echoing Marvin Gaye's "Right On," he measures the breadth of his generation—from the crack-pushers to the hip-hop activists. "Even when the condition is critical, when the living is miserable, your position is pivotal," he concludes, deciding that it's time to clean up his own life.

Kweli never fails to deliver fresh, if often despairing, insights. On "The Proud," he offers a sage reading of the impact of 9/11 on the 'hood—"People broken down from years of oppression become patriots when their way of life is threatened." Later in the song, he cites California's Proposition 21—the culmination of nearly two decades of fears of gangs, violence and lawlessness—

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and ties it to the intensifying nationwide trend of profiling and brutality against youth of color. But he scoffs at a revolution coming at the ballot box. Of the 2000 Florida elections, he angrily concludes, "President is Bush, the Vice President is Dick, so a whole lotta fucking is what we get. They don't want to raise the baby so the election is fixed. That's why we don't be fucking with politics!"

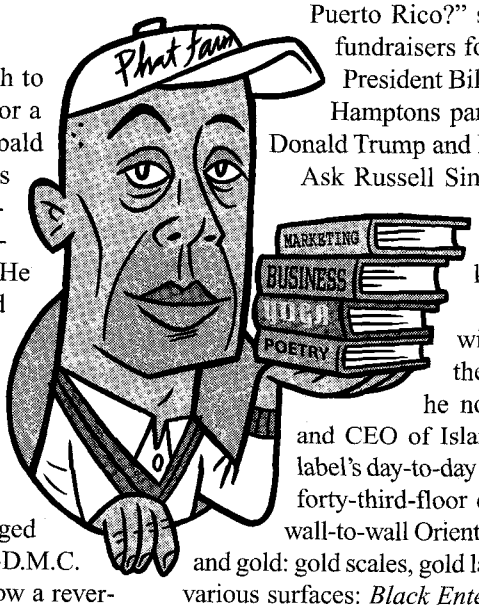
But politicians can't stop fucking with rap and the hip-hop generation. Senator Joe Lieberman regularly rallies cultural conservatives against the music. Michael Powell's corporate-friendly, laissez-faire FCC has censored only the white male rap star Eminem and the black feminist hip-hop poet Sarah Jones. Texas Republican John Cornyn overcame African-American Democrat Ron Kirk's November Senate bid by linking him to police-hating (and, interestingly, ballot-punching) rappers. When Jam Master Jay, the well-respected, peace-making DJ of rap group Run-D.M.C., was murdered in October, police and federal investigators intensified their surveillance of rappers while talking heads and tabloids like the *New York Post* decried the music's, and this generation's, supposed propensity for violence and lawlessness.

Now a hip-hop parent, Kweli hopes to steel his young 'uns for these kinds of assaults. "I give them the truth so they approach the situation with ammunition," he raps. "Teach them the game so they know their position, so they can grow and make their decisions that change the world and break traditions." While he critiques his elders for failing to save the children, he knows his generation's defensive b-boy stance is not enough: "We gave the youth all the anger but yet we ain't taught them how to express it. And so it's dangerous."

Here is the hip-hop generation in all its powder-keg glory and pain: enraged, empowered, endangered. The irony is not lost: A generation able to speak the truth like no other before is doing so to a world that still hasn't gotten the message. ★

RUSSELL SIMMONS'S RAP

by MILES MARSHALL LEWIS



Russell Simmons, known for decades as Rush to his friends, is of average height and build for a man his age (45), with a cleanshaven face, bald dome and light complexion. In conversation, he is likely to switch gears from hip-hop culture and Eastern spirituality to politics and rap-industry commerce several times in the span of just ten minutes. He was born in Jamaica, Queens, the son of Howard University graduates, and moved to residential Hollis at 8; dealt marijuana and was very briefly warlord of the 17th Division of the Seven Immortals gang during the 1970s; and eventually attended, then dropped out of, City College a few credits short of a sociology degree.

In the halcyon days of hip-hop, Simmons managed the seminal rap acts Kurtis Blow, Whodini and Run-D.M.C. (his younger brother is Joseph "Run" Simmons, now a reverend) through Rush Management. Shortly thereafter, he founded Def Jam Records out of partner Rick Rubin's New York University dorm room, introducing the likes of L.L. Cool J, the Beastie Boys and Public Enemy to Middle America. His wildly successful clothing line Phat Farm has been in operation since 1992. He is universally regarded as having established the blueprint of the hip-hop multimedia mogul. Russell Simmons *is* hip-hop.

Or is he? "Russell, as quiet as it's been kept, you are not hip-hop!" begins an open letter circulating on the Internet by rap activist Rosa Clemente—founder of Know Thy Self Productions, a speakers' bureau dedicated to social change and organization of the hip-hop generation. "Where were you when the hip-hop community united over the issue of AIDS, apartheid, police brutality, gun violence, and the bombing of Vieques, Puerto Rico?" she asks. "You were having those fundraisers for Senator Hillary Clinton, former President Bill Clinton, and having your summer Hamptons parties hobnobbing with the likes of Donald Trump and Martha Stewart."

Ask Russell Simmons about Rosa Clemente, and he'll ponder meditatively and then respond sincerely with, "Why do I know her?"

Not long ago I spent some time with Simmons in mid-Manhattan at the offices of Phat Farm, from where he now operates. (Currently chairman and CEO of Island Def Jam, Lyor Cohen runs the label's day-to-day management.) We sit in his spacious forty-third-floor office, which is distinguished by a wall-to-wall Oriental rug, lots of mahogany wood grain and gold: gold scales, gold lamps, gold clocks. Magazines adorn various surfaces: *Black Enterprise*, *XXL* featuring popular Def Jam artist Jay-Z on the cover, Simmons's own *Oneworld*. The bookshelf features titles like former mayoral candidate Mark Green's *Selling Out* and Simmons's memoir, *Life and Def*. So widely known for conducting business on the move that Motorola recently partnered with him to produce the i90c limited-edition mobile phone, it's slightly strange to see him sitting behind a desk, a candle serenely flickering its flame on the surface next to flowers sprouting from a Phat Farm shoebox.

Speaking with Russell Simmons is, I imagine, akin to taking an audience with the President. We are interrupted several times by various assistants and speakerphone intrusions as we discuss his political leanings of late. Partially responsible for bringing Public Enemy (the revolutionary rap trio that produced the masterpiece of the genre, *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*)

Miles Marshall Lewis, a former editor at Vibe *and* XXL *magazines, is completing an essay collection tentatively titled* The Death of Hiphop *(Akashic), due out next summer. His essays and music criticism have appeared in the* Village Voice, LA Weekly, Rolling Stone, Spin *and many other magazines.*

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to the world, Simmons has felt the pang of social responsibility since becoming a yoga adherent, marrying Kimora Lee, and fathering two children. He spearheaded the creation of the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network in July 2001—a "coalition of hip-hop artists, record company executives, Civil Rights leaders, [and] community activists," according to its executive director, former NAACP head minister Dr. Benjamin Chavis—and has recently been voicing political opinions like a seasoned pundit. Ask him what sparked his greater awareness, and his answer is characteristically two parts reflection, one part filibuster.

> 'Russell, quiet as it's been kept, you are not hip-hop! Where were you when the community united over AIDS, apartheid, police brutality?' —Rosa Clemente

"They ask this question all the time. I'm never really satisfied with my answer," he starts. "But it's a little bit of a greater connection with myself. It started seven, eight years ago with yoga practice. I started reading all the propaganda, the yoga sutras and the basic books, right? Reading that kind of crap. Meditation and the whole physical and spiritual practice has helped, though. It gave me a better understanding of my purpose. You know what yoga means, first, right?"

No, I admit.

"'Union with God' is what yoga means. And living in a state of yoga is a state of union with God, which is, like, *samati*. That's what a state of yoga is. That's what you're moving toward, so you know that that's your purpose. And so, that is the reason I'm involved in more social and political stuff. I have my own Foundation for Ethnic Understanding. I have my own Rush Philanthropic Arts Foundation, my own other charitable kind of philanthropic work, all those things, because I have a better relationship with myself, with my higher self."

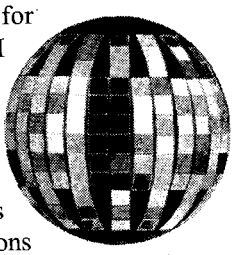
Of course, political movements have been built on spiritual foundations before—think of Mohandas Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X. In keeping with the familiar spiritual axiom that character assessment be based on deeds rather than rhetoric, a 53-year-old, bespectacled Benjamin Chavis enters from his office down the hall to discuss the organization's progress. Simmons takes one of his many persistent phone calls.

"Prior to June 4, Mayor Bloomberg announced that he was cutting $300 million additionally from the school budget. This was on top of the $400 million that Giuliani had made the year before," says Chavis. "Nine days before June 4, Russell and the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network called for young people to come after school, to meet us down at the City Hall. The teachers, who had already planned a rally that day, were planning for maybe 10,000 people. Well, 100,000 young people showed up, and it was unprecedented."

"It was the largest urban mobilization," he continues, "and it was not only that Jay-Z, P. Diddy, L.L. Cool J, Doug E. Fresh, Alicia Keys, Erykah Badu and Rah Digga came to speak, but they spoke on the issue. They were clear that we want an equal, quality education, that we were protesting these budget cuts. The next day, the Mayor restored $298 million back into the budget. So that was a tremendous victory. And it showed that we have the ability to flex a certain muscle in terms of mobilization."

Benjamin Chavis exits, but he is far from the final visitor to Simmons's office. Simmons mentions that celebrated yoga instructor Sharon Gannon attended his 2000 fundraiser for Hillary Clinton, and soon someone enters with a copy of her book *The Art of Yoga*. ("You can have it. It's a beautiful book," he says.) Two middle-aged white men breeze through to pitch some sort of beverage for hip-hop consumption. Gary Foster, who works closely with Simmons on the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network, is introduced at one point, and a discussion of press in the *New York Times* takes place. Simmons is constantly hustling, hence the nickname Rush. One man's hustler, however, is another man's politician, and at times, Simmons seems poised for his own mayoral bid. He looks me squarely in the eye and vehemently denies any interest in political office, not the first time he's done so. "I have no aspirations. To move young people to a higher consciousness is my greatest aspiration, to make a difference in terms of young people."

In the June 2002 issue of *The Source*—a hip-hop organ so popular it's the largest-selling music magazine on newsstands nationwide—Russell Simmons and Benjamin Chavis (then Benjamin Muhammad) published "Power Movement," an essay detailing a fifteen-point agenda for the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network. (Until recently, the organization's headquarters were at *The Source*.) The "social, political and economic development and empowerment of our families and communities" ranks highest; environmental concerns also rate, as Point 15 protests the targeting of low-income communities for toxic waste dumps and other environmentally hazardous developments. Point 9 states, "We want reparations to help repair the lingering vestiges, damages and suffering of African Americans as a result of the brutal enslavement of generations of Africans in America." The reparations issue is serious to him, and it serves to highlight the synergy a man as enterprising as Russell Simmons is able to generate for his causes. The Phat Farm Classic, a sneaker that enjoyed unprecedented success in 2002 ("We sold 2 million"), was buoyed by an advertising campaign promoting awareness for reparations featuring Run of Run-D.M.C. "I have 'reparations rallies,' quote unquote, or sneaker parties, all over the country," says Russell Simmons. "And I do interviews on every radio station and morning show as I get to each city, and we talk about the reparations movement." Money contributed to the reparations cause is admittedly minimal, he says. But countering suspicions that he's out to sell sneakers under the guise of a political issue, he opines, "It's really about awareness. We just gave $15 million to the [Millions for Reparations] March. I don't believe it's a racial issue. I think it's a simple American justice issue. Reparations



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is greater affirmative action. It's underwriting better job training in communities where it's necessary, or equal high-quality education. It's a way of repairing the past. Repairing the past is a simple meaning of reparations, right? Repairing the past is giving opportunity, access to America. And the government owes us access, greater access. We just want to increase dialogue."

A hip-hop political movement may sound curious to those with only a peripheral understanding of the culture and its goings-on. Though materialistic, nihilistic, often misogynistic rappers like Eminem and Jay-Z command the attention of mainstream record buyers and video networks, hip-hop has an active social consciousness [see Jeff Chang, page 17]. MCs like Lauryn Hill, Mos Def, Common, dead prez and numerous others provide balance to the oft-popularized nihilistic arm. So politicizing the hip-hop nation is not necessarily the greatest challenge facing the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network; that's already happened, to some extent anyway. More to the point is that pre-existing grassroots hip-hop activists are bound to take issue with the network as a come-lately group stealing media thunder from efforts that have long been under way.

"Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, Youth Force Coalition, Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice, Sista 2 Sista, El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice, Prison Moratorium Project: All those organizations work around issues such as political prisoners, the Rockefeller drug laws, the prison industrial complex, police brutality, violence against women, the AIDS epidemic in our community," Rosa Clemente writes in her open letter to Simmons. "Give me a call and I will help set up the meeting so you can meet them. Instead of hosting one of your many fundraisers for white elected officials, why don't you host a fundraiser or, better yet, attend one of the many events and mobilizations that these black and Latino/a youth organize?"

Traveling to South Bronx High School in a limousine with director Ellen Haddigan and four starring poets of Def Poetry Jam on Broadway for some community outreach, Russell Simmons responds calmly to these fiery charges. "I don't know of them," he readily admits. "I'm just meeting them now. I don't know why they call themselves 'hip-hop'—they don't know no rappers. But I do know why: They're young, they're from this generation and all that shit. But they don't have any influence, except that they have their heart, and they're hard-working. And they're probably a lot more educated and sophisticated than I am about all the issues that I'm supposed to be involved in that they're involved in. I want to be connected to every one of 'em. And I want them to be connected to us. We'd love that. So, I mean, she's right. I don't know exactly what else she said. What she think, that we're not trying to talk to them?"

Well, maybe more that you are trying to hold out the Hip-Hop Summit Action Network as the premiere rap activist organization, I suggest.

"I ain't trying to do shit. I'm trying to get Jay-Z to be premiere. My job is to get Jay-Z to be the premiere.... He saw the poetry [on Broadway] last night; he was inspired. I hope he changes. He moves people in all kinds of ways." Notwithstanding the complaints of his detractors, Russell Simmons occupies a space that other hip-hop magnates (Roc-A-Fella Records' co-CEO Damon Dash; Irv Gotti of Murder Inc.) have yet to reach in terms of maturity and, apparently, spiritual and political evolution. ★

HOLY ROCK 'N' ROLLERS

by LAUREN SANDLER

In Hicksville, Long Island, on any given Sunday afternoon, pierced and tattooed teenagers in black clothing gather to listen and watch as groups of kids like themselves tear their fingertips on guitar strings and scream unintelligibly into microphones. All the elements of the indie scene announce themselves: the spiky haircuts, the leather, combat boots, the wide eyes, the acne. At one recent show, Matt Koldinski, the lead singer of the band Legacy, muddled his lyrics with screams and threw his head back in ecstasy. To those who assembled, this was music in all its soul-baring transcendence.

Then, in a break between songs, Koldinski took the mike and did something that would be unthinkable at most hardcore shows. Panting and solemn, he appealed to his audience of peers to come up to him after the show, to talk about their problems and their confusion, to open their hearts to him. He has been there, he can relate, he says. And he has found the answer. "The reason I'm here, that the band is here, is that we love Jesus," he says. "He's everything to us. And no matter what we do wrong, we'll never lose that love. So if you have any problems, come up, say God loves me, let me help you find the way."

Legacy and the seven other bands gathered to perform this Sunday are just a few examples of the exploding number of Christian rock bands that have formed over the past decade to express and evangelize their faith. Each lead singer, after prayer ("let our words sing like daggers of truth into their hearts, dear Lord," one band member intones, hands clasped) echoes Legacy's invitation for connection, and it appears to be working. Christian music is the only format that has increased sales in the past year—this year it'll crack the 50-million-album mark—and it is poised to eclipse country music in sales, according to Rick Welke at *Radio and Records* magazine. He says nearly 500 bands have been signed to major labels, and that doesn't include the innumerable unsigned garage bands around the country that perform in venues like this storefront church just off Jerusalem Avenue, past Jericho Bagels.

It makes a kind of sense that these disaffected kids have found hope and meaning in their own "personal relationships with Jesus," in their literal reading of the Gospel, and in their collective desire to spread the word—in their own words. And yet it's still surprising to see these punks in metal cuffs and fatigues, the girls in too much eye makeup, the guys in too much

Lauren Sandler, who writes about media and culture, lives in New York.

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hair dye, setting up a table at this show to dispense leaflets against pornography, masturbation and, most significant, abortion. That part is thanks to Rock For Life, an organization that launched almost ten years ago when Bryan Kemper, then a mohawked security guard trying to make it in the hardcore scene, says he saw a woman lying on a table at a Los Angeles abortion clinic, which he interpreted as a sign from God that he should get into activism. "God gave me a literal vision for Rock for Life. I saw the concerts, the kids in the streets. I knew from that moment on that's what my life had to be." That moment was more than ten years ago. Since then, more than 100,000 kids have signed Rock for Life's pledges to work to end abortion. There are more than eighty youth chapters nationwide, generating tables at hundreds of shows like this one every week.

'God gave me a literal vision for Rock for Life. I saw the concerts, the kids in the streets. I knew that's what my life had to be.'
—Bryan Kemper

I've seen kids wearing the T-shirts, from skate parks in Portland, Oregon, to the New York City subway: black with white block letters that read, YOU WILL NOT SILENCE OUR MESSAGE. YOU WILL NOT MOCK OUR GOD. YOU WILL STOP KILLING OUR GENERATION. In addition to the tables and T-shirts, Rock For Life participates in more standard forms of political activism, like organizing speakouts and protests, through their position in the youth outreach wing of the American Life League. Chapter members also hold prayer and worship services in front of abortion clinics and pass out literature in front of high schools.

Rock For Life finds its biggest constituency at Christian rock festivals every summer, a dozen gigantic Jesuspaloozas across the nation, drawing more than a half-million people combined—festivals with names like Kingdombound, Alive and Sonshine, which director Bob Poe began two decades ago. Back then, Christian rock was a marginal genre. In the early 1980s he'd host seven or eight bands for a small crowd. "That's all the Christian world had to offer," he says. "Now we have 125 bands and turn away more than twice that many." As evangelism has spread ferociously throughout the country in the past several years, the Christian music industry has flourished in tandem.

The Christian rock festival has become the superchurch for the thrashing masses and the ultimate mobilizing force for anti-abortionists. Says Bryan Kemper, "It's one thing to hear a message in a church, a message at school, to hear a message in an institution where you're supposed to hear a message that isn't coming from you, it's coming from a quote-unquote authority. The whole concert scene is supposed to go, 'Let go.' We're bringing a message there where people have guards down, where people are open to listen. In school, kids' guards are up, at a concert they're open to a lot of stuff. It's on their turf. It's their own identity. And music is such a huge part of every kid's life—music connects almost everybody—when you have that passion in the music, the singer says, 'Hey, stand up for this, look into this,' it causes kids to look into it and stand up like nothing else."

He's right that if you look across the culture, it's tough to find galvanizing forces that have the same effect among youth—especially dissenting youth—as music. Music was of course deeply tied to the antiwar movement in the 1960s, it was the whole purpose of Live Aid in the 1980s, and it's what brings so many of these kids into the evangelical fold. The collective experience of the live show—that intoxicating merger of music's transcendence and the authority of performance—is its most powerful form. These Christian rock shows even seem capable of reversing what most people would expect of teen behavior. At a festival last year, one of the 40,000 people in attendance had an asthma attack, and the singer of a band halted the show so the audience could pray until her breath was restored. The group prayer lasted forty-five minutes without a complaint. Just imagine that energy turned toward right-wing politics.

Bob Poe says of his yearly festival, "Our event isn't a political event but a behavioral event." This is consistent with evangelicals' insistence that all of their behavior—whom they choose to be intimate with, what books they read, what they drink, how they vote—is part of a way of life directed by their religion and aimed at developing a closer personal relationship with God. (Even, perhaps, what they drive: which may have inspired General Motors' decision to sponsor a Christian music tour.) One can't disassociate any part from the whole, and thus most are loath to talk about politics as politics, since any form of activism is just carrying out beliefs in some behavioral form. But these events may be politically effective precisely because they stress that behavior is merely a reflection of deep spiritual commitment. (Technically, no political campaigning—of the electoral sort—is permitted at these festivals, as they are all run by not-for-profit organizations. A press representative of the Christian Coalition admitted that the organization leaflets Christian music festivals but declined an interview.)

When some artist-preachers, whether easy-listening or headbanging, break into the mainstream, they scramble to cover up their evangelical roots, whether because of corporate pressure or their own desire to forge new identities. POD, which stands for "Payable On Death," has become Atlantic Records' bestselling act, topping rock charts, ruling MTV, selling out huge shows nationwide. With the exception of one song, all its recent lyrics make the band's personal relationship with Jesus an intentionally ambiguous thing (much like Creed's music can be interpreted as the exuberant or self-sacrificing experiences of teen love of the back-seat, not of the pew, variety), but take a look at the message boards on their website and you'll see where their core fan base lies. You'll find heated discussion among members with online identities like "Livin'4Christ" about topics like dating "heathens" and personal faith stemming from "fear of hell." Not your usual top-ten-drum-solos banter.

But not everyone weighing in on these bulletin boards is a believer. Neither is every person who shows up at a Christian rock festival or an underground show. In Hicksville, many of the kids I talked to had never "known Jesus" until they found him in the

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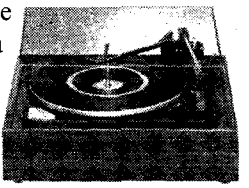
mosh pit. Kevin Murray of the band Now or Never says, "Sure, most of us come to this when we've been smoking pot or having sex or getting depressed, or hitting a point where we know we can't live like that anymore. And you come to a place like this and see a guy like me, and I tell you I've been there, and I've pulled through it, and I can help you, and it doesn't matter if you're a total stranger or think you don't believe in God, or what. I'll show you the way."



It's moving, actually, to be surrounded by a mass of kids dressed in the accessories of anger and marginalization, scowling their teen scowls, and hear the opposite of what you'd expect at a secular gig—a voice, Murray's in this case, shouting to the crowd, "If you want to talk to any guy in this band about what's going on with you, come up. We can help." And then to see guys with tattoos, guys with downcast eyes peering from their black sweatshirt hoods approach band member after band member, saying, "My friend brought me, and he thought I could talk to you," a bizarre twist on the cool-posturing punk shows I'd occasionally check out in high school. To watch a community of people form before your eyes, reaching out to each other, connecting through music and performance to each other and to a shared vision, committing to the political causes they identify as joined with that vision—it's the active community of a liberal utopian's dream.

That is, if you squint so you can't see those Rock For Life shirts. If you can block out the repetition of "Jesus" and "Lord" from the songs and conversations. This, of course, is impossible. Even though "religion" is a dirty word to these instruction-fearing believers (as Murray says, "We're against religion—our God is a God of freedom, not one of religion who won't let you have tattoos"), it's the only reason this scene works. And that's the reason politics so effortlessly becomes a part of the scene. It's the nature and extraordinary effectiveness of evangelical Christianity—the whole-life, whole-belief experience. So whether you're praying in church or at a club, or screaming on a stage or at the doors of an abortion clinic, it's all just an articulation of the oft-repeated "way we live." Is it a political movement? Not in the usual sense. But it is a massive and exponentially self-replicating cultural movement that binds itself inherently to politics.

It's hard to imagine that anytime soon a secular rock band might, as John Lennon said, be bigger than Jesus. ★

FEAR OF A PUNK PLANET

by IVAN KREILKAMP

The Chicago-based magazine *Punk Planet*—nominated for the past two years in *Utne Reader*'s Alternate Press Awards for "General Excellence," along with such better-heeled competition as *The Nation*, *Mother Jones* and *The Ecologist*—recently celebrated its fiftieth issue and the publication of a well-received collection of interviews: *We Owe You Nothing* (Akashic Books). The magazine's name poses a question—what exactly would a punk planet look like?—that its contents answer in ways that will surprise any reader for whom punk inspires visions only of loud guitars and torn leather jackets.

I asked the magazine's editor, Daniel Sinker, about his operating definition of the term as he took a break from moving offices to a new space three times as large: that is, with room for three human beings at once, rather than just one at a time. "At this point the definition of punk matters very little to me. It's a means to an end more than anything else. A way of filtering the world." He adds ruefully, "Of course, punk is one of those things where everyone believes their own definition is the right one."

Punk is, of course, a musical and subcultural tradition established around 1976 by bands like the Ramones in New York and the Sex Pistols in London. But punk has also evolved, for some, into a much broader category: a lifestyle, an ethic, a worldview. Reading through *We Owe You Nothing* and recent issues of *Punk Planet*, you encounter repeated references to punk as, above all, a principle of countercultural openness, heterogeneity and action. For poster designer Frank Kozik, responsible for some of the most memorable graphic design of the 1990s underground, punk was originally a *salon des refusés*: "What I remember from the early days of punk [in Austin, Texas] is that you'd go to a show and everybody would be there. Every outcast got to go: the fags, weird leftover hippies, new wavers, confused jocks, proto-punk rockers, bikers, skinheads, Mexicans—all these freaks would go to these shows."

According to this perspective, punk's meaning has always resided less in any particular style than in an attitude of creative volatility: "I would go there and think, 'This is like science fiction…' It was exciting to go to a show, because something was going to happen." Something: not any one thing, and nothing predictable ahead of time, but something. *Punk Planet* also, however, regularly receives complaints from readers who see punk as a single, conservative tradition. Here's one prompted by the magazine's (wonderful, I think) all-Chicago issue #50: "You couldn't actually find anything PUNK to write about, so you write about a bunch of fucking country bands like the Mekons and Bloodshot Records or fucking wank-music like Tortoise? And"—the offended reader alludes here to a profile of Hot Doug's, an independent Chicago hot-dog stand—"what the hell was that hot dog bullshit?"

Punk Planet's first issue—as an undistinguished newsprint fanzine—came out in 1994, when Sinker was a student at the Art Institute in Chicago. It was originally published by a collective, but Sinker quickly filled a leadership vacuum and became the editor in chief; since then, the magazine has depended to a large extent on his personal dedication. In his introduction to the fiftieth issue, Sinker hazarded an analogy between the magazine's worldview and "the ethics of the Chicago underground." "In Chicago,

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Sinker's paean to the value of honest labor may bring to mind Benjamin Franklin more than Sid Vicious, but his emphasis on work and labor does point to a common denominator in much of *Punk Planet*'s eclectic content. Punk was appropriated by the mainstream in the 1990s as an attractively rebellious style and a catchy updating of rock-and-roll traditionalism (for example, Green Day's three-chord guitar tunes). *Punk Planet* aims to recover and propagate an alternate punk tradition, one rooted in an anticorporate DIY—"do it yourself"—ethic that can easily be extrapolated from the realms of music and popular culture to politics, the workplace and indeed everyday life as a whole.

"The DIY ethic is a big part of what sets punk and the underground apart from the mainstream," Sinker comments. "In the mainstream there's very little opportunity to make or build things. Things are just there—you just buy them. People connect with brands instead of with themselves or their communities. I think we should use our hands and minds to make our own world, our own reality. So one aim of *Punk Planet* is to show people how to make their own things—and to offer examples of people who are doing that."

These "things" include not only songs, fanzines and CDs but any number of other objects, events, ideas and forms of political and community action. One of the magazine's most appealing regular features is "The DIY Files," recent installments of which have ranged from Heather Whinna's exhaustive step-by-step advice, in issue #50, on how to book a large punk show ("bring in Girl Scout cookies or a case of beer" when you collect money from the record store selling the tickets; "selling 3,000 tickets to anything is a pain in the ass and small tokens of your appreciation go a long way"), to issue #51's delightful "Making your own Lamp": "Use electrical tape to cover any excess wire (wrap each individually, then tape them together if need be)." The cover feature of the May/June 2001 issue (#43), "Become the Media," is essentially an expanded DIY file, with detailed articles on digital editing, sound recording and the like. And the magazine's regular political coverage has pushed the do-it-yourself concept all the way to, for example, Jeff Gurtzel's trip to the West Bank as a part of a small group of internationals bringing medicine and food to Palestinians under siege. The DIY ethic also applies to *Punk Planet* itself, by necessity as well as choice. Working as the magazine's only full-time or even regular employee, Sinker produces six 150-page issues a year notable for their high standards for graphic design and visual quality as well as for writing. (I first picked up the magazine when one of its striking, full-color original-art covers caught my eye.)

Once you accept a capacious definition of punk as no less than a principle of self-determined action and creation in the world, motivated by dissatisfaction with the commercial, consumerist mainstream, it makes perfect sense that *Punk Planet* would publish cover stories on the history of the Washington, DC, punk scene as well as on "the sorry state of the American criminal justice system"; interviews with punk-affiliated musicians like Ian MacKaye, Kathleen Hanna, Thurston Moore and Sleater-Kinney, as well as with Noam Chomsky and members of the Central Ohio Abortion Access Fund. (The magazine's

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version of punk—heavily influenced, Sinker says, by the early '90s Riot Grrrl movement—is resolutely feminist.)

I suggest to Sinker that *Punk Planet* may have evolved into something resembling what the *Whole Earth Catalog* was to the 1960s counterculture—not just a magazine but a community resource for a national movement. Sinker admits the similarity but notes a few differences between contemporary punk and that earlier American counterculture: "A much larger part of punk has its identity based around independence and working outside of established institutions. That could be part of why it's lasted—by now punk has lasted a lot longer than the 1960s movement ever did. Punk is much less hierarchical, much more about autonomy. In some ways it means that punk has to rebuild the wheel forty times—but that also means that there are forty wheels at the end of the day instead of just one."

May those forty wheels continue to spin. ★

KATHLEEN HANNA'S FIRE

by HILLARY FREY

On the self-titled debut record by punk/dance band Le Tigre, there's a short song called "Eau d'Bedroom Dancing" that pays tribute to the timeless tradition of spinning around one's bedroom, alone. "There's no fear when I'm in my room/It's so clear and I know just what I want to do/All day bedroom dancing," confides lead singer Kathleen Hanna, her girlish voice ringing over a soft synthetic drumbeat. If the words sound like a poem you (ladies?) might have scribbled in your notebook at 14, consider these lines: "No one to criticize me then/No one to criticize." Sounds like a pop song, reads like a lament.

"I've always felt frustrated listening to a band and dancing, and there's some knucklehead who comes up and says, 'Oh, hey, I love how you dance,'" explains the 33-year-old Hanna, who's been the reigning feminist of the indie-rock scene since it exploded ten years ago. "I think, 'Did I ask for that because I was standing in front having such a good time?' And then, 'Maybe I'll stand in the back and dance,' or 'Maybe I'll stay home and listen to the record and dance in my room by myself.'... It's that sort of feeling that even in leisure time you're still on the clock and being looked at through the male gaze—to turn a little Feminist 101 phrase on you," she adds with a laugh.

For Hanna, who formed Le Tigre in 1999 with painter/writer Johanna Fateman and video artist Sadie Benning (who left the band after their debut album and was replaced by JD Samson, co-founder of Dykes Can Dance), the personal has long fueled the political, and the political has long fueled the music. From her early days with bands like Amy Carter, Viva Knieval and the hugely influential (and angry) punk quartet Bikini Kill, to her current work with the very fun, and very feminist, Le Tigre, Hanna has consistently sought to bring the issues that have affected her and her friends and fans—including domestic violence, unequal pay and the right to choose—to the fore of the indie scene.

Hillary Frey is assistant literary editor of The Nation.

But Hanna's path to the stage was hardly direct. As a student at Washington State's Evergreen College in the late 1980s, she studied photography and did spoken word performances of her writing—an avenue of artistic expression she was persuaded to abandon by one of her favorite writers, countercultural icon Kathy Acker. "[Acker] asked me why writing was important to me, and I said 'Because I felt like I'd never been listened to and I had a lot to say,'" she remembers. "And she said, 'Then why are you doing spoken word—no one goes to spoken word shows! You should get in a band.'"

In the small city of Olympia—in many ways the nerve center of what is now thought of as the Seattle explosion—there was ample opportunity to get onstage. Hanna knew the music scene intimately. As part of a feminist collective art gallery, she frequently booked bands for fundraising concerts and used the proceeds to keep the gallery open for business. (This space was across the street from a women's shelter where Hanna worked as a rape counselor—an experience that had a huge impact on her. "I got a better education there than I did from college," she says.) Following Acker's advice, Hanna put together Amy Carter, her first group.

A short time later, in 1991, Hanna started Bikini Kill, just as the Riot Grrrl movement was attracting young women across America. In interviews, Hanna has denied being a Riot Grrrl "founder," but the feminism espoused by that movement is very much in sync with her own—one that builds awareness from the personal experiences of oppression and unfairness that every young woman goes through and turns that awareness into action. In a way, Riot Grrrl meetings were like consciousness-raising sessions updated for the 1990s—and so were Bikini Kill shows. "I always saw performing as an advertisement for feminist activity," Hanna explains. Concerts didn't erupt into rallies, exactly, but following Hanna's example of what a young woman can be—loud, smart, political and sexy—girls and young women started to speak out. Though vastly outnumbered by boys and men in the crowd, they would wait for the end of a show and then, inspired by the music, confide in Hanna. "Stories I heard from girls at the show—about incest, rape, domestic violence—were a little too much emotionally," says Hanna. "But I was able to write songs about them."

"The music is a way for women to validate what they're going through," says Hanna. "That was the era in the early '90s, when all this work that had been done was getting pushed under

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the rug and there was such a big backlash—I didn't even know the word backlash, I just knew what it felt like."

I never saw Bikini Kill play. In fact, they were about to disband when I first became aware of them. So it's hard to reconcile the radical punk history with the Kathleen Hanna I had breakfast with recently, who's outspoken but not angry, strong but not fierce. Similarly, it's hard to draw a musical line from the screaming genius of Bikini Kill to the party-time girl-pop of Le Tigre. Hanna says simply, "Le Tigre is more where I'm at now."

Still, connections abound, in the mission and the politics behind both groups. Indie rock was, and remains, the territory of boys and men. But since the early '90s, the scene has opened up considerably. Credit is due to Hanna; it's hard to imagine bands like Sleater-Kinney, the Butchies, the Donnas and countless others—including Le Tigre—existing without the earlier work of Bikini Kill. "I think we really did have the goal in mind that we wanted to change things, at least in the music scene," Hanna explains. "It was also really selfish.... I wasn't making music at that time for a bunch of white, suburban male teenagers. The lyrics weren't about them, they weren't for them. It was frustrating when those were the people showing up at the shows because it was like, 'These aren't even the people I'm trying to talk to.'"

And they still aren't. If ever there was a band for young feminists, Le Tigre is it. Check out the lyrics to "Hot Topic," a sort of shout-out to women, men and groups whose pro-woman work and stance deserves credit: "You're getting old, that's what they'll say, but/Don't give a damn I'm listening anyway." (Those to whom the song pays tribute include Carolee Schneemann, Gayatri Spivak, Nina Simone, Angela Davis and James Baldwin.) The rallying "F.Y.R." (Fifty Years of Ridicule)—inspired by Shulamith Firestone's second-wave classic *The Dialectic of Sex*—calls on feminists to keep fighting: "Can we trade Title Nine for an end to hate crime?/RU-486 if we suck your fuckin dick?... Feminists we're calling you/Please report to the front desk."

But above all, Le Tigre's music is fun. It's danceable. It makes you want to move. (In the indie scene, this is radical. In the wake of the dwindling fad of moshing it seems that audiences have embraced austerity, where head-nodding is the only acceptable form of acknowledging a beat.) Mechanical beats, lots of samples, simple guitar and bass lines with smart lyrics on top make for a funky mélange that's like the girl-rap-funk trio of Luscious Jackson crossed with Kate Millett. What's more, at a typical Le Tigre show, the audience is at least half-female—full of, as Hanna calls them affectionately, "crazy good dancers." It was for them that the "LT Tour Theme" was written: "We see the girls walking towards the dance floor and we remember why we go on tour. Won't you dance some more?"

In her memoirs, Emma Goldman—that dancing anarchist-feminist—recounts a story in which a young radical whispers to her that "it did not behoove an agitator to dance." Her rejection of that notion has been famously retold as, "If I can't dance it's not my revolution"—a wonderful slogan, to be sure. But Goldman's actual rebuttal, as recorded in her autobiography, is even better—and more apt for feminists like Kathleen Hanna: "I want freedom, the right to self-expression, everybody's right to beautiful, radiant things." She would have loved a Le Tigre concert. ★

EMPIRE OF THE AIR

by JENNY TOOMEY

For too long, musicians have had too little voice in the manufacture, distribution and promotion of their music and too little means to extract fair support and compensation for their work. The Future of Music Coalition was formed in June 2000 as a not-for-profit think tank to tackle this problem, advocating new business models, technologies and policies that would advance the cause of both musicians and citizens. Much of the work the FMC has done in the past two years has focused on documenting the structures of imbalance and inequity that impede the development of an American musicians' middle class, and translating legislative-speak into language that musicians and citizens can understand. Our most challenging work, however, and the project of which we are most proud, is our analysis of the effects of radio deregulation on musicians and citizens since the passage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act.

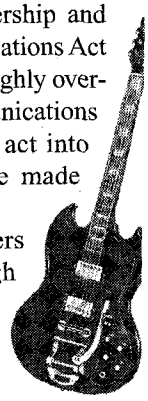
Jenny Toomey, executive director of the Future of Music Coalition, is a musician. Kristin Thomson, Michael Bracy and Peter DiCola also contributed to this article.

Radio is a public resource managed on citizens' behalf by the federal government. This was established in 1934 through the passage of the Communications Act, which created a regulatory body, the Federal Communications Commission, and laid the ground rules for the regulation of radio. The act also determined that the spectrum would be managed according to a "trusteeship" model. Broadcasters received fixed-term, renewable licenses that gave them exclusive use of a slice of the spectrum for free. In exchange, they were required to serve the "public interest, convenience and necessity." Though they laid their trust in the mechanics of the marketplace, legislators did not turn the entire spectrum over to commercial broadcasters. The 1934 act included some key provisions that were designed to foster localism and encourage diversity in programming.

Although changes were made to limits on ownership and FCC regulatory control in years hence, the Communications Act of 1934 remained essentially intact until it was thoroughly overhauled in 1996 with the passage of the Telecommunications Act. But even before President Clinton signed the act into law in February 1996, numerous predictions were made regarding its effect on the radio industry:

§ The number of individual radio-station owners would decrease. Those in the industry with enough capital would begin to snatch up valuable but underperforming stations in many markets—big and small.

§ Station owners—given the ability to purchase



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more stations both locally and nationally—would benefit from economies of scale. Radio runs on many fixed costs: Equipment, operations and staffing costs are the same whether broadcasting to one person or 1 million. Owners knew that if they could control more than one station in a local market, they could consolidate operations and reduce fixed expenses. Lower costs would mean increased profit potential. This would, in turn, make for more financially sound radio stations, which would be able to compete more effectively against new media competitors: cable TV and the Internet.

§ There was a prediction based on a theory posited by a 1950s economist named Peter Steiner that increased ownership consolidation on the local level would lead to a subsequent increase in the number of radio format choices available to the listening public. (Steiner, writing in 1952, was not talking about oligopolistic control of the market by a few firms, as we have in the United States; rather, he was basing his predictions on an analysis of BBC radio, which is a nationally owned radio monopoly, not an oligopoly.) According to Steiner's theory, a single owner with multiple stations in a local market wouldn't want to compete against himself. Instead, he would program each station differently to meet the tastes of a variety of listeners.

But what really happened?

Well, one prediction certainly came true: The 1996 act opened the floodgates for ownership consolidation. Ten parent companies now dominate the radio spectrum, radio listenership and radio revenues, controlling two-thirds of both listeners and revenue nationwide. Two parent companies in particular—Clear Channel and Viacom—together control 42 percent of listeners and 45 percent of industry revenues.

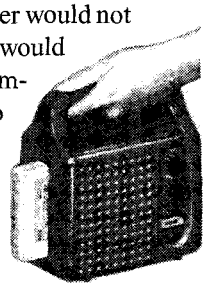
Consolidation is particularly extreme in the case of Clear Channel. Since passage of the Telecommunications Act, Clear Channel has grown from forty stations to 1,240 stations—thirty times more than Congressional regulation previously allowed. No potential competitor owns even one-quarter the number of Clear Channel stations. With more than 100 million listeners, Clear Channel reaches more than one-third of the US population.

Even more bleak is the picture at the local level, where oligopolies control almost every market. Virtually every local market is dominated by four firms controlling 70 percent of market share or greater. In smaller markets, consolidation is more extreme. The largest four firms in most small markets control 90 percent of market share or more. These companies are sometimes regional or national station groups and not locally owned.

Only the few radio-station owners with enough capital to buy additional stations have benefited from deregulation. Station owners have consolidated their operations on a local level, frequently running a number of stations out of a single building, sharing a single advertising staff, technicians and on-air talent. In some cases, radio-station groups have further reduced costs by eliminating the local component almost entirely. Local deejays and program directors are being replaced by regional directors or even by voice-tracked or syndicated programming, which explains a marked decrease in the number of people employed in the radio industry.

Prior to 1996, radio was among the least concentrated and most economically competitive of the media industries. In 1990 no company owned more than fourteen of the more than 10,000 stations nationwide, with no more than two in a single local market. But we found that local markets have now consolidated to the point that just four major radio groups control about 50 percent of the total listener audience and revenue. Clearly, deregulation has reduced competition within the radio industry.

As a result, listeners are losing. With an emphasis on cost-cutting and an effort to move decision-making out of the hands of local station staff, much of radio has become bland and formulaic. Recall Steiner's hopeful theory that an owner would not want to compete against his own company and would therefore operate stations with different programming. We found evidence to the contrary: Radio companies regularly operate two or more stations with the same format—for example, rock, country, adult contemporary, top 40—in the same local market. In a recent *New York Times* article, "Fewer Media Owners, More Media Choices," FCC chairman Michael Powell denied this, propping up Steiner's theory by saying things like, "Common ownership can lead to more diversity—what does the owner get for having duplicative products?" But we found 561 instances of format redundancy nationwide—a parent company operating two or more stations in the same market, with the same format—amounting to massive missed opportunities for variety.



It is time to put to bed the commonly held yet fundamentally flawed notion that consolidation promotes diversity.

Still, from 1996 to 2000, format variety—the average number of formats available in each local market—actually increased in both large and small markets. But format variety is not equivalent to true diversity in programming, since formats with different names have similar playlists. For example, alternative, top 40, rock and hot adult contemporary are all likely to play songs by the band Creed, even though their formats are not the same. In fact, an analysis of data from charts in *Radio and Records* and *Billboard's Airplay Monitor* revealed considerable playlist overlap—as much as 76 percent—between supposedly distinct formats. If the FCC or the National Association of Broadcasters are sincerely trying to measure programming "diversity," doing so on the basis of the number of formats in a given market is a flawed methodology.

This final point may be the most critical one as we face an FCC that is poised to deregulate media even further in the next few months. (In September, the commissioners voted unanimously to open review of the FCC's media ownership rules.) It is time to put to bed the commonly held yet fundamentally flawed notion that consolidation promotes diversity—that radio-station owners who own two stations within a marketplace will not be tempted to program both stations with the same songs. There's a

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clear corporate benefit in "self-competition," and it's time we made regulatory agencies admit that fact.

Even in the beginning, radio was regulated to cultivate a commercial broadcast industry that could grow to serve the greatest number of Americans possible. As the decades have passed, most calls for deregulation have come from incumbent broadcasters interested in lifting local and national ownership caps that protect against the competitive pressures of other media.

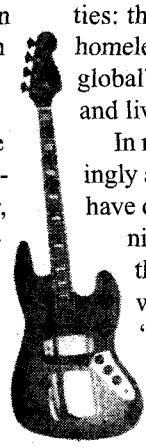
While the effects of deregulation have been widely studied and discussed, scrutiny is focused on the profitability of the radio industry. But the effect of increased corporate profitability on citizens is rarely, if ever, discussed. Radical deregulation of the radio industry allowed by the Telecommunications Act of 1996 has not benefited the public. Instead, it has led to less competition, fewer viewpoints and less diversity in programming. Substantial ethnic, regional and economic populations are not provided the services to which they are entitled. The public is not satisfied, and possible economic efficiencies of industry consolidation are not being passed on to the public in the form of improved local service. Deregulation has damaged radio as a public resource.

Musicians are also suffering because of deregulation. Independent artists have found it increasingly difficult to get airplay; in payola-like schemes, the "Big Five" music companies, through third-party promoters, shell out thousands of dollars per song to the companies that rule the airwaves. That's part of why the Future of Music Coalition undertook this research. We at the FMC firmly believe that the music industry as it exists today is fundamentally anti-artist. In addition to our radio study, our projects—including a critique of standard major-label contract clauses, a study of musicians and health insurance, and a translation of the complicated Copyright Arbitration Royalty Panel proceedings that determined the webcasting royalty rates—were conceived as tools for people who are curious about the structures that impede musicians' ability to both live and make a living. Understanding radio deregulation is another tool for criticizing such structures. We have detailed the connections between concentrated media ownership, homogenous radio programming and restricted radio access for musicians. Given that knowledge, we hope artists will join with other activists and work to restore radio as a public resource for all people. ★

DOES EUROPE DO IT BETTER?

by JOHNNY TEMPLE

In more than fifteen years of rock-and-roll touring, my worst night of sleep followed a June 10, 1989, show at Centro Sociale Leoncavallo, an anticapitalist squat in Milan. On that impossibly long tour, ending just months before the Berlin wall fell, my band Soul Side played at social centers lodged in squatted buildings in Italy, Holland, Spain, Denmark, Norway, Switzerland and Germany. Several of these places were hygienically challenged, with mangy dogs scurrying about, leaking sewage pipes and nowhere to bathe. None, however, rivaled the squat in Milan where we were taken after our concert at Leoncavallo to "sleep" in a bat-infested room, on mattresses that had seemingly been marinated in bodily fluids.



Since the mid-1970s, groups of anarchists, communists, punks and artists across Europe have availed themselves of liberal housing policies to seize and inhabit abandoned buildings—former factories, churches, schools, etc.—and turn them into nonprofit, anticapitalist social centers. These "autonomous zones" have succeeded to varying degrees in existing outside of government regulation. They are essentially illegal, and plenty are mercilessly crushed by the police (like the vast majority of American attempts at squatting). But many European squats have been tolerated, and have somehow managed to keep their fortified doors open. Milan's Leoncavallo (www.leoncavallo.org) is Italy's oldest and most well-known social center, established in 1975 in a crumbling building by a band of squatters with a manifesto. After several evictions, one of which spurred national solidarity demonstrations in 1994, today's Leoncavallo resides in an assortment of buildings behind huge walls that can be quickly barricaded in the event of another police raid. Social centers like Leoncavallo host a wide range of cultural and political activities: theaters, bookstores, art galleries, guaranteed shelter for homeless immigrants, meeting spaces for antiglobalization ("no global") organizing, Internet cafes, soup kitchens, yoga classes and live music of varied genres.

In recent years European squatters have clashed with increasingly aggressive police forces. As a result, many social centers have disappeared, while a few have been given official recognition and support from local governments. But even under the reign of Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi—who is hostile to anything and anyone falling under the "no global" umbrella—Italy has nearly 150 active social centers, most of them stationed in squatted buildings.

A few months ago my current band, Girls Against Boys, discovered that Leoncavallo is still considered a menace to Italian society. Following concerts in Prague and Zagreb, our tour was turning back west and we were all looking forward to entering Italy, home of the world's best roadside food services. Disappearing European borders and the advent of a single currency, the Euro, have made life easier for touring musicians, but bands in vans will always have hard times at borders. As we crossed out of Slovenia on October 31, Italian border guards examined our tour itinerary, which listed concerts that night in the Centro Sociale Rivolta outside Venice and two days later at Leoncavallo. "Do you know that these places are against

Johnny Temple plays bass guitar in the rock bands Girls Against Boys and New Wet Kojak and is the publisher of Akashic Books (www.akashicbooks.com), based in Fort Greene, Brooklyn. Girls Against Boys' sixth album, You Can't Fight What You Can't See *(Jade Tree Records) was released in May 2002, and New Wet Kojak's fourth,* This Is the Glamorous *(Beggar's Banquet), is forthcoming in February.*

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the government?" we were asked. We responded with placid, innocent smiles, but our van was emptied and searched meticulously with electronic devices, X-rays and dogs. After two hours—broken up by twenty-five-minute cigarette breaks for the arrogant gatekeepers—they finally conceded defeat and let us re-pack our van and get on our way.

As we soon found, both social centers were indeed in protest mode, organizing travel groups to the European Social Forum (ESF) on November 6–9 in Florence, a summit of more than 400 antiglobalization groups, political parties and NGOs from all over Europe, focused largely on preventing a US attack on Iraq. Two hours after crossing the border, we pulled our van into the Rivolta complex and loaded our equipment onto the stage around barking dogs and large palettes stacked with videocassettes documenting recent "no global" demonstrations. During the concert, one large room was dedicated exclusively to screening protest footage. (Granted, the only people hanging out there looked like they had partaken too liberally in the hash that flows freely in most social centers.) During the weeks leading up to the ESF summit, dozens of activists from outside Italy had been denied entry into the country. So in a symbolic call for open borders, several days after our concert members of Disobbediente, an activist group formed in the aftermath of the G-8 protests in Genoa in 2001, traveled from Rivolta to an immigration control station in Gorizia, a town at the Slovenian crossing, to cut fences.

On November 2 we saw similar mobilization at Leoncavallo. After our soundcheck that day, several of us headed over to the squat's new Internet center to check our e-mail. We logged in amid members of Disobbediente preparing for the antiwar march on November 9, which would conclude the ESF events in Florence. (Neither Leoncavallo nor Rivolta is affiliated with the anarchist Black Bloc, often blamed for violence and property destruction at demonstrations.) The march ended up drawing more than 400,000 (estimates range up to 1 million), significantly more than the 300,000 protesters in Genoa. And unlike those G-8 demonstrations, this march was completely peaceful—if a bit noisy, since some groups brought their own sound systems mounted on the backs of trucks.

There is no American equivalent to Europe's squats and social centers. With low door prices and a variety of offerings supplementing the live music—political tabling, vendors, cheap food—our concerts in European social centers are always well-attended, and unlike in the United States, the age range of the audience is invariably broad. Few US squatter communities have been able to withstand brutal police crackdowns. What's more, American squatters do not enjoy the tolerant housing policies of their European counterparts, let alone much sympathy from the public, thanks to the American reverence for private property.

Social centers offer a rare glimpse of an underground community that has successfully integrated its music with its politics. The income generated from events, musical or otherwise, is funneled into legal defense for incarcerated comrades, building maintenance or other community endeavors. While the political activism of most American bands consists of an occasional benefit concert, the unique venue provided by European social centers allows musicians to be part of an actual, thriving subculture that truly deserves the label "alternative." ★

COMMENT
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 7)

against the first one. You do that again. You let them dry, pressing down so they hold together."

I knew enough by now to guess the prison wasn't providing any envelopes.

"You make those too," he said. "The hardest part is sealing it. Maybe you use a piece of string, maybe hair. There's a type of glue you can get off the inside of a mattress, the place where they seal up the edges."

As for the words he put in his letters—well, when that much work goes into getting your materials together, you choose your words carefully. You might not have a lot of space, either. So sometimes McMillan would just write "Need writing supplies," or "Not allowed paper," and leave it at that. The idea was to get somebody's attention, so they'd investigate. He might cut himself, and leave a drop of his blood on the paper. He might say more, too. In his letter to the Innocence Project, he did.

Last year a lawyer came to see him. When they tested his DNA it was definitively proven that he had not committed the rape of a young woman in a Memphis park, of which he'd been convicted twenty-one years earlier. The rapist had approached a couple in a park, pulled them out of their car and attacked them with considerable force before robbing them. During McMillan's trial the information was never introduced that at the time of his alleged crime, his legs were virtually useless, the result of his having been shot in the spine by a Memphis police officer in another incident, unrelated to the commission of any crime, two years earlier. No evidence was ever found linking McMillan to the car, or the scene. His conviction rested entirely on the victim picking him out of a lineup he'd been forced to participate in. Testimony by the victim's boyfriend—that it was too dark to see anything beyond the assailant's facial hair—was brushed aside by cross-examiners, who bullied him into identifying McMillan in court. It is probably relevant to mention here that McMillan is black.

He was released a few months back, with a hundred dollars and one set of clothes. He's living at his mother's apartment now, looking for work. There is not much point in being angry, he says. When you've had everything taken away from you, you really appreciate the things that matter. You find beauty in the most unlikely places.

We were standing in front of a glass display case full of shells when he said that. He was studying the mother-of-pearl on an abalone. "The world is full of wonders," he said.

It was time for him to head to the airport. Afterward, I walked through Central Park, back to where I live at the moment. I had to stop at Kinko's to pick up a ream of paper. I was printing a document from my computer that day. A hundred pages shot out of my printer in the time it might have taken Clark McMillan to steam and press together three sheets of toilet paper. JOYCE MAYNARD

Joyce Maynard is a journalist and fiction writer. Her new novel, The Usual Rules, *which deals with a family coping with the aftermath of September 11, will be published by St. Martin's in February.*

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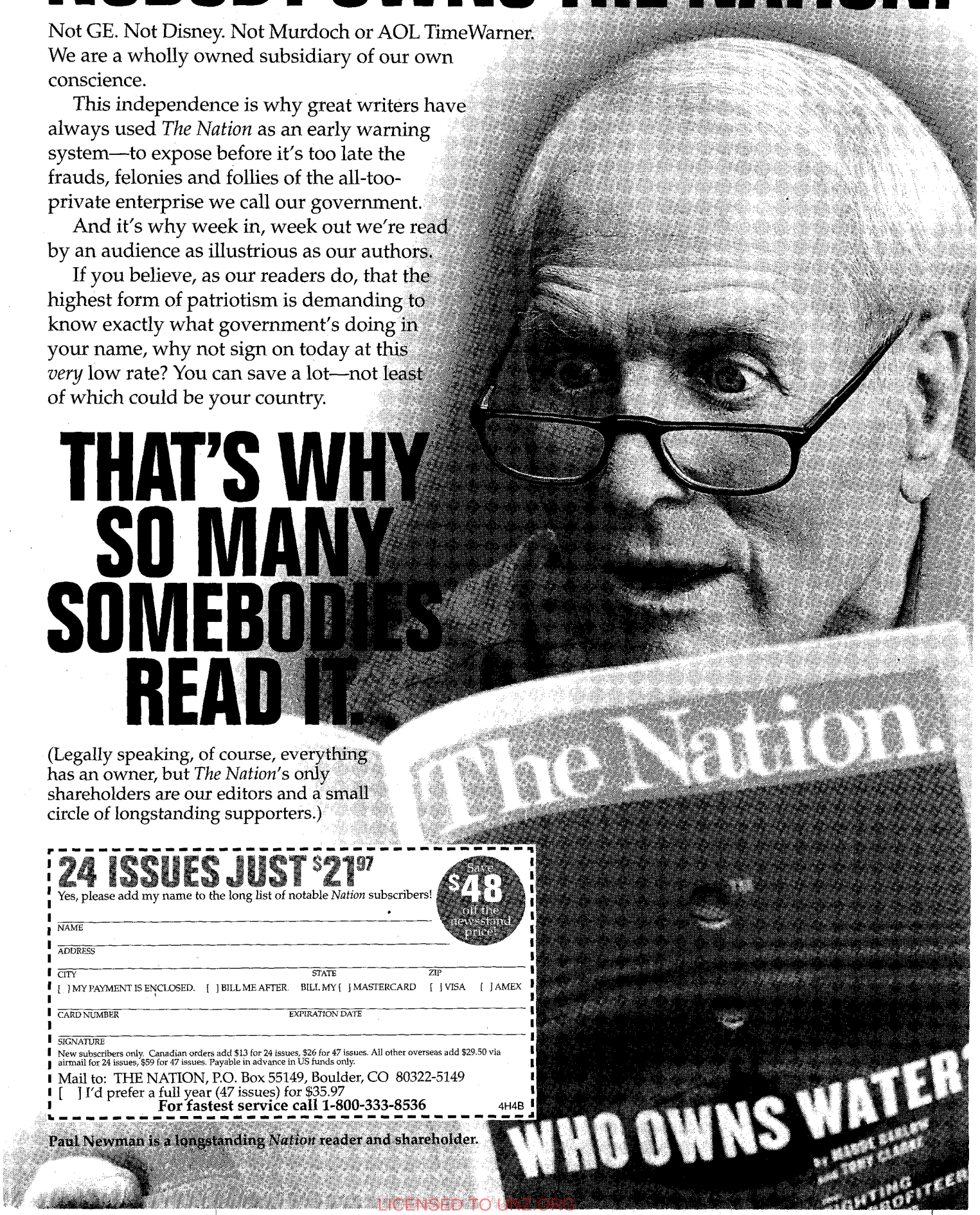

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Paul Newman is a longstanding *Nation* reader and shareholder.

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

Sweet Soul Music

GENE SANTORO

MOTOWN: Music, Money, Sex, and Power.
By Gerald Posner.
Random House. 350 pp. $24.95.

STANDING IN THE SHADOWS OF MOTOWN.
Directed by Paul Justman. 108 minutes.
Artisan Entertainment.

When Martin Luther King, standing on a platform, addressing an off-stage white society, says, "You don't have to love me to quit lynching me," he is disinfecting his doctrine of agape from sentimentality—from the notion of easy solutions by easy love.

—Robert Penn Warren, "Who Speaks for the Negro?" (1965)

As Trent Lott struggled to "repudiate" segregation fifty years after it was outlawed, about the only point he left out of his incoherent counterattack is that he was a soul-music fan. Now, I don't know that he was, but as a Southern frat boy, he would have been ironically typical of the initial audiences for Stax Records, the Memphis-based label whose music, along with Motown's, helped transport cultural integration to a broader plain. Good ol' boys who wouldn't eat with "the colored" steadfastly booked fledgling Southern soul acts year after year, providing steady income and a tour circuit before singers like Carla Thomas and Otis Redding burst into America's mainstream.

For burst they did, in that era of hope and recovery, of reopening possibilities after the McCarthyite witch hunts and hysteria had narrowed options in the American mainstream. By 1965, the year after the first landmark Civil Rights Act, when optimism seemed to permeate the economy, the culture, the scent of the air—when the false dawns and cataclysms forming on the distant horizon, presaging the long twilight of Thomas Pynchon's *Vineland*, were still fist-sized bad dreams—Motown, a black-owned independent record label rocketing from outsider to insider status, was already a top-of-the-pops (read, white crossover) hit-making factory. In the mid-1960s, it suddenly seemed that black Americans owned the top of the pop charts, breaking out of their racial enclave of rhythm and blues. In August 1964 "Where Did Our Love Go," cooing, lightweight pop by the Supremes, elbowed Dean Martin out of *Billboard*'s No. 1 American slot. Just as suddenly, it seemed, black entertainers zoomed from occasional to continual sightings on TV, especially teen-oriented music programs like *Hullabaloo* and *Shindig*, and those hosted by Dick Clark and Les Cole.

Over the next couple of years, in a trend started by the British Invasion bands, black singers' hits, from "What'd I Say" and "Do You Love Me" to "Respect" and "In the Midnight Hour," became a core part of the shared language of largely white garage bands across the land. For a few years there, it seemed like Dr. King's dreams were being enacted in the arena of popular culture. As historian Peter Guralnick writes in *Sweet Soul Music*, "It was as if the rhythm and blues singer, like the jazz musician and professional athlete before him, were being sent out as an advance scout into hostile territory." It looked like the civil rights movement—which had always deployed the church music that gave birth to soul for its uplifting anthems and rallying cries; whose leaders, from King to Malcolm X, moved masses with the same churchy cadences that soul singers finessed—might infuse a new generation via the genetic structure of American popular culture, white and black, right down to the grassroots levels of homemade entertainment.

Motown was the black corporate equivalent of garage-band heaven, a label chasing that latest of American dreams, the hit single.

This had never happened before in quite the same way. In early jazz, the best white players, like Bix Beiderbecke and guitarist Eddie Lang, worked with black innovators; Beiderbecke jammed with Louis Armstrong, and in 1928–29 Lang (born Salvatore Massaro) recorded duets with Lonnie

Nation *music critic Gene Santoro's most recent book is* Myself When I Am Real: The Life and Music of Charles Mingus *(Oxford).*

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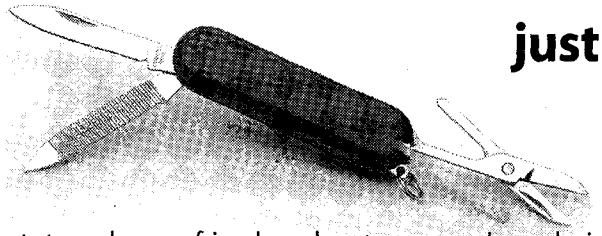

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Johnson, his great black counterpart; to avoid appearing interracial, Lang was credited as "Blind Willie Dunn." Before the war, the Swing Era produced countless young white wannabes who lifted black jazz innovations and styles and then proceeded to stardom. In the postwar era, doo-wop found blacks and Italians synthesizing similar elements in abutting neighborhoods on the street-corner hangouts of the lower classes. Rock and roll was essentially rhythm and blues (as the white executives running *Billboard*'s charts redubbed "race music") with a rockabilly twist. Soul music, however, was different: It had next to no white stars. And yet the spectrum of sounds soul offered in its heyday captured young white American ears on a scale that foreshadowed (and would only be rivaled by) the hip-hop of later generations.

The Motown Sound

To me, the Supremes sounded like black cotton candy—exactly what Berry Gordy Jr., Motown's founder and maximum leader, wanted. (In New York, even "white" AM radio stations spun slices of black music, and at the far right of the dial were "black" stations like WWRL and WLIB, and after midnight came the erratic clear-channel stations from around the country, crackling over the transistor radio hidden beneath the covers pressed to your ear.) But I was drawn ineluctably to the springy, powerful bass lines and drums driving the songs. The tensile rhythm sections produced a chug-a-lug of interlocking parts often buried beneath layers of vocal schmaltz and period-piece echo and overblown orchestration. (It was rumored there were 2-by-4s stomping through "Baby Love" to make sure white Americans could learn to feel the backbeat.)

Hits—mainstream hits made for white teeny-boppers—were Motown's raison d'être, and its stuff sounded transparently like what it was: assembly-line product. The history of American pop is stuffed with songs written to imitate hits; that sums up the role of Tin Pan Alley. But Gordy made Motown self-generating, self-sufficient. He hired songwriters and producers, and at the weekly production meetings he held votes to decide which songs sounded most like potential hits; they'd make it to the release schedule. In that context, it shouldn't be surprising how repetitive the Motown Sound could get. There were exceptions: Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, whose material and arrangements were usually hipper; Martha and the Vandellas, who unlike the Supremes slashed and burned on "Dancing in the Streets" and "Heat Wave"; the Four

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Tops, who essentially kept recording the same old song (an egregious example of Motown's prefab product), made irresistible by Levi Stubbs's charismatic gospel shouting and some of the funkiest bass and drum parts on the label. Ironically, the sameness of the material crafted for each artist conveyed the lesson that soul, molded from blues, gospel and jazz, could teach a lesson as applicable to bebop as to hip-hop: What mattered more than stylistic range was emotional power and technical finesse in its variations.

Years before the Supremes' triumph, the press had been snuggling up to Motown and Gordy. The son of a Southern migrant-entrepreneur with a large, close-knit family, Gordy started Motown, after failing at other ventures, with money borrowed from the family credit fund (all the Gordys used this for their business startups). Motown grew rapidly from its 1959 launch, and Gordy spread the company across buildings on West Grand Boulevard. He encouraged a family-style feeling (with many of his actual relatives at top jobs) in the informal day-to-day operations; it yielded big benefits. Set in Detroit, the city's only significant record label, Motown attracted a formidable but overlooked pool of local black talent of all musical stripes. There were jazz musicians and modified doo-woppers, songwriter and producer wannabes, kids who wanted to be stars—they all hung out in the connected stretch of little buildings that housed Motown's operations. There was the recording studio, a converted garage that usually ran 24/7 as producers lined up to record their demos for the Friday production meetings. There was the array of offices for ever-expanding departments: the charm school, which taught poise, right down to how to sit; the booking agency, which handled all of Motown's acts; spaces for tutorials in dance steps and fashion and image-making; quality control, which judged the hit potential of each week's production output and culled likely winners for the big Friday meetings. While they swept floors and answered phones and typed and oohed and ahhed huddling in the hallways, young Motown wannabes absorbed the surroundings like Hollywood contract players hoping to be stars: Here they could learn, be remade, reborn into the record biz—which, after all, had supplemented boxing and other sports as possible paths into mainstream American life, culture and economy, something the movies had yet to do for them. And if Gordy paid most of his salaried employees comparative peanuts, and some of them not at all, well, he also, like a benevolent paternalist, oversaw an open, competitive shop where anyone could in theory (and often enough in fact, just like the larger American mythology, to make the myth credible) rise to the highest levels. His employees believed. In book after book, interview after interview, the constant refrain from everyone involved, however disaffected, repeats how the family feeling shaped the corporate structure, reiterates the intimacies and give-and-take of the constant creative flow. Motown was the black corporate equivalent of garage-band heaven, a garage label, the cousin of hundreds of backyard operations that sprang up in the postwar era to chase that latest new American dream, the hit single.

In service to that dream, Gordy replicated the Hollywood studio system, itself an adaptation of the auto industry's assembly line, annexing functions to his label in ways no one else had, to attain total control, a total product. Is it any wonder so much of it seemed interchangeable?

Gordy's unbending will, his dream to take the white pop market, powered Motown. Other black-owned labels, from Duke-Peacock in Houston to Vee Jay in Chicago, had produced great music but rarely broke beyond black audiences. Even though Vee Jay was one of Gordy's early distributors, signed the Italian-American doo-wop group the Four Seasons and had released the first Beatles album in the United States, one of its owners ended up working for Gordy. As Nelson George, author of several books on Motown, explains in his provocative and clear-eyed *The Death of Rhythm and Blues*, "Motown promoted Gordy as an affirmative, unthreatening symbol of black capitalism, one as acceptable in the *New York Times* as on the cover of *Ebony*." He had the perfect double image for showbiz: He was both street (he'd hustled at pool halls and seethed with attitude) and middle-class (his family was a hive of upward mobility). And he was himself talented, not just a suit. He'd co-written hits like "Reet Petite" and "Higher and Higher" for Jackie Wilson, the brilliant singer often straitjacketed into soppy material and gooey arrangements by white handlers.

The first song Gordy cut at his Hitsville Studios in 1960, the breeding place for what he dubbed "The Sound of Young America," was titled "Money (That's What I Want)." Thanks to his shrewd grasp of the music business and the culture, along with his paternalistic sense of company finances, over the subsequent decades he'd get plenty.

The national marketplace he sized up was still generally balkanized, serviced by small mom-and-pop retailers and regional distributors. Only a couple of the major labels and larger indies like Atlantic had na-

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tional distribution pipelines; the rest was a patchwork quilt. The country was only slowly losing its longtime, sharply defined regional identities to the emerging mass media; it teemed with hundreds, if not thousands, of local subcultures, each with its own musical spins. Thanks to technological advances like the relative cheapness and portability of tape-recording equipment, a kind of speculative bubble inflated the number of independent labels. Would-be producers wrote songs, put together sessions, recorded them and peddled the results to a label or distributor. In a society touting Organization Men, this was a leap of faith into a crapshooting world, where fame and glory and money could roll in and roll out with the same blitheness, where sex and drugs and creativity weren't stuffed into gray flannel suits, where the factory whistle put out a backbeat that, if you were lucky, would be yours. Con men and hipsters and geniuses rubbed mohair-suited shoulders in a demimonde that rejected the square world that rejected them.

A fledgling indie-label operator needed a few traits. First was the "ears," that combo of instincts, training and luck to spot a potential hit. Then there was grit: You had to be willing to bet your financial life over and over on recording a hit, getting it pressed, finding listeners and buyers. Maybe most important of all was access to deeper pockets. Collecting from regional distributors, who could coax airplay out of deejays that would up demand and sales, even on a hit single, was a difficult if not impossible task, and busted many or most independents. As you might expect, a black independent label head needed more of all these qualities than his white counterparts. Gordy had them. He understood early, for instance, that his newborn operation would be choked by the failure of Chess and other regional distributors to pay, so he negotiated a national distribution deal with a major label instead. Moves like that certified Gordy as the Great Black Hope, and he cast his company as a vehicle for others; talent, which basically meant hit-making ability, was the only currency that mattered at Motown.

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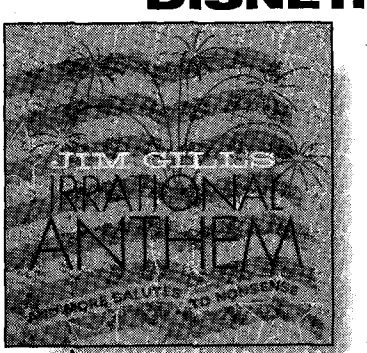

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That currency Motown produced in abundance. Between 1960 and 1979 it racked up more than 100 top ten hits on the pop charts, the white listening gauges of where the real money flowed in the music industry. But Gordy's ambitions soon outstripped even that enviable stream of chart-toppers. How many black acts before the Supremes had raked in big bucks playing the mob-owned Copacabana in New York, or the mob-related hotels in Vegas? Virtually none. But taking that direction meant the already lightweight trio learned old standards with typical, old-fogy charts. To my friends, Gordy's Sound of Young America became the sound of our parents, slightly modified.

Gordy had tapped into big money, somewhat ironically following the path to mainstream stardom staked out for the rock-and-roll era by Elvis Presley and Col. Tom Parker, Presley's voracious manager. And Gordy made sure his people made no public missteps. Chuck Berry could be busted under the Mann Act at the height of his popularity. Jack Johnson and Joe Louis and Berry could all be bedeviled by the IRS. None of that broke Motown, despite the inevitable proliferation of sex and drugs in the West Grand Boulevard buildings when the money started rolling in and the IRS investigations followed.

Crossing Over

Gordy was incisive: He understood the crossover potential of black music but buttressed it with artistic development, keeping acts on contract, often for years, until they landed a hit. But he was simultaneously a throwback to bad old practices that black (and many white) artists had faced with white label owners since the industry's inception. Motown stars had apparently unlimited expense accounts, but in fact they were charged by the label for everything from recording and tour costs to wardrobes. Their royalty rates were extremely low to nonexistent; Motown didn't bother to issue statements. And Gordy controlled the finances of many of his stars right down to their bank accounts, which needed his co-signature on checks. Then there were his strict divisions of labor: Few Motown artists, aside from Smokey Robinson, were allowed to be songwriters or producers, and vice versa. There were the low salaries. There was the way he schmoozed the black deejays in the early days, when he needed them to put his product across, then slid to the white side of the aisle. (No Black Power spokesman, Gordy did start a short-lived label—one of the thirty-nine he would own—to release speeches by the likes of Dr. King.) Overall, Gordy's tactics were no better and were often worse than those of white-label owners like the Chess Brothers—who recorded the revolutionary electric blues of Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf and Berry's own rockabilly-flavored r&b, which grabbed young white America—or Syd Nathan, whose King Records became the ambivalent home of James Brown's soul revolution.

This stuff started to come out in the late 1960s, when the lawsuits began. Following the Detroit riots of 1967, Motown's music went in several directions. The Supremes, especially Diana Ross, now Gordy's lover and primo star, kept heading further into traditional showbiz. Meanwhile, Norman Whitfield, a new young producer who had risen through the Motown ranks, was influenced by the riots as well as the sounds of Jimi Hendrix and Sly & the Family Stone; he edged the Temptations into socially relevant, psychedelic funk like "Cloud Nine" and "Ball of Confusion," with improbable success. Then the shouting started. Holland-Dozier-Holland, Motown's key early hit-makers, by then promoted to central positions, sued Gordy and the label. Increasingly angered by the ever-increasing time, money and perks Gordy lavished on Diana Ross at their expense, other artists sued, left the label or both. Gordy's shoddy contractual practices, which let Motown cream not only off the top but the middle and even bottom of everything that happened at the label, began to surface.

The Jackson 5 saved Motown from this first wave of deterioration, riding back-to-back hits that made them huge stars. But in negotiating contracts with iron-willed Joe Jackson, the clan's monstrous patriarch, Gordy pulled the same sorts of lowball stunts he'd built into his label's practices. By the mid-1970s, Joe wanted his boys out of Motown, and signed them to Epic, a wing of CBS Records, for comparatively huge advances and guarantees. Gordy was left to haggle about Motown's ownership of the Jackson Five name; the group became the Jacksons. And Motown the recording company was a hollowed-out shell.

In fall 1968, Gordy moved to Hollywood, and with his move Motown in Detroit

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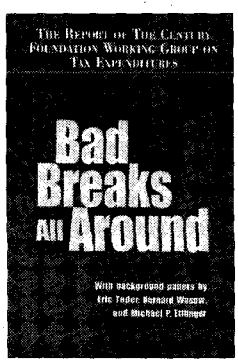

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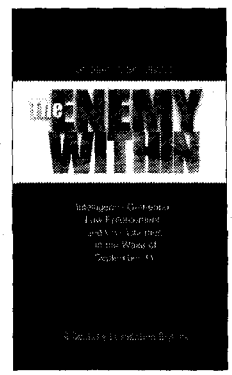

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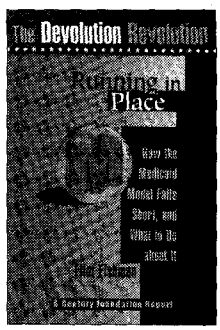

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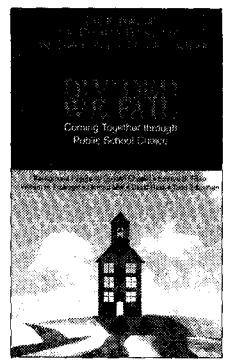

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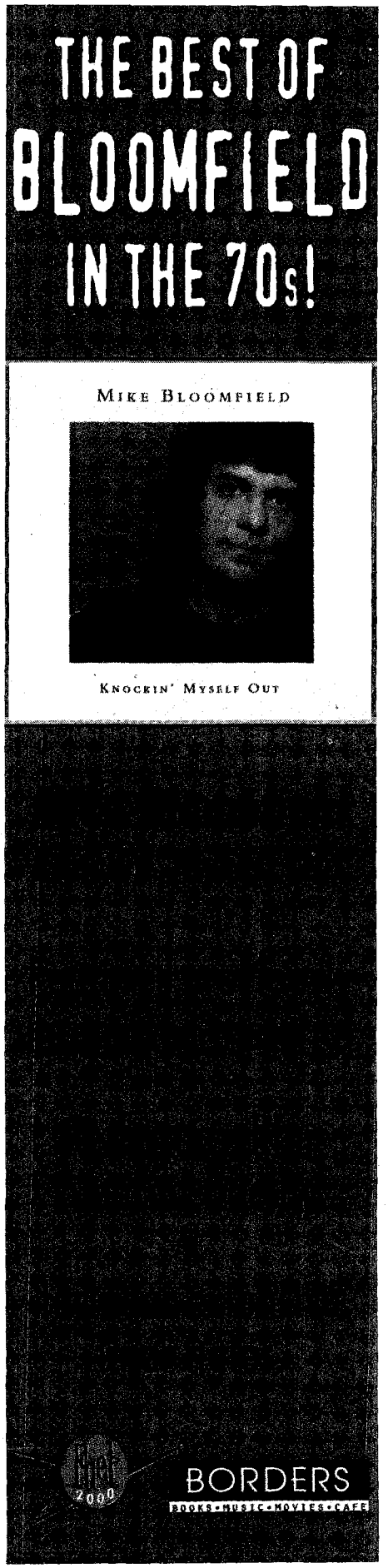

lapsed into vestigial operation, though Hitsville was officially open until 1975. The shift inevitably changed Motown's nature; whatever was left of the camaraderie and improvising informality died with Hitsville. But now Gordy wanted to conquer Hollywood, to make movies and TV, where the real money was. Ross, his manipulative paramour, the would-be diva who graduated from Supreme to soloist, was his focus: He wanted to transform America's black sweetheart into a movie star, transfer his Svengali touch to the silver screen. It didn't work in *Lady Sings the Blues*, which miscast Ross as Billie Holiday, or in *Mahogany*, a muddled, turgid mess directed de facto by Gordy himself, or in *The Wiz*, for which Ross insisted on playing a ludicrous Dorothy. (She had broken up with Gordy after having his child.) Still, the royalties from all those hits kept rolling into Gordy's Jobete publishing company, to the tune of millions per year, as he licensed scads of songs in the pop marketing explosion of the 1980s, when Michael Jackson bought the Beatles catalogue and licensed "Revolution" to Nike for its ads. Gordy, after all, was Michael's mentor. Remember the California raisins singing "I Heard It Through the Grapevine"?

Most of these stories and many of the themes appear in the latest book about Motown by Gerald Posner, who has also written about the Kennedy and King assassinations. Posner's writing flows well; drawing extensively on earlier sources, he does a well-crafted job of recreating the *Rashomon*-like world of Motown. His legal-investigative bent leads him to incorporate much material from the dozens of suits, from divorces to contractual cases, involving Motown. The result is a handy, relatively short, balanced compendium of the label's business, political and sexual intrigue that juggles myriad characters and subplots skillfully. But most of it is familiar from the torrent of books and articles, information and gossip that Motown has generated over the past thirty years.

For me, the real lure of Motown is what interests Posner the least: the backing musicians, a long-faceless, shambling outfit who, unbeknownst to most outside Hitsville, called themselves the Funk Brothers. Aside from a couple of names gleaned from music and fan magazines, deejays and such, all we knew was that this floating crew of musicians was responsible for the propulsive sound that outshone the vocals on so many Motown releases. Bassist James Jamerson was a hero for musician-wannabes like me long before we knew his name; we could hear his afterimages in white bassists from Paul McCartney to the Grateful Dead's Phil Lesh.

During 2002, *Standing in the Shadows of Motown*, a documentary offshoot of the book by Alan Slutsky about the Funk Brothers, briefly surfaced. (It will soon be available on video.) Combining old footage with "re-creations" and interviews with survivors, it also serves up musical segments featuring the band, which sounds terrific, backing a motley array of vocalists that includes Joan Osborne, Bootsy Collins, Ben Harper, Me'shell Ndegeocello and Chaka Khan.

The movie codifies and augments the information that only slowly leaked out about the people who controlled Motown's pulse. Most of the couple of dozen musicians involved hailed from the South, had come north with families looking for work at the auto plants, as Southern blacks had done since the days of Henry Ford. So Detroit simmered sounds from raw country to urban sophistication, and jazz thrived, yielding a crop of top-tier musicians during the postwar era. The Funk Brothers were among them; their members had played with Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, Sarah Vaughan, Dinah Washington, John Coltrane and a few hundred other jazz stars. Drummer Benny Benjamin backed Bird and Ray Charles, Muddy Waters and Chuck Berry. Pianist Joe Hunter worked to make his left hand like Rachmaninoff's and Art Tatum's.

Once you stripped the voices off Motown songs, you heard a tightly tuned rhythm machine, its camshaft rotating the pistons in a chug-a-lug pattern of syncopated parts that put out enormous horsepower. At the heart pulsed Jamerson, one of this documentary's dead, unheralded stars. Born on Edisto Island in the Carolinas, Jamerson made his first diddley bow—the longstanding homemade string instrument rural Southern blacks trained on, which in this case was a string and a bowed stick the boy stuck down an anthole "and made the ants dance." Using one picking finger (most bassists use two or three) Jamerson developed his innovative attack, complex lines that dance within their patterns, subdivide time, create anticipation, build tension and release into the rhythmic moving bottom of pop music, an unpredictable camshaft that somehow delivered more thrust. Harnessing to pop music the temporal creativity fostered by bebop and developed on bass by Oscar Pettiford and Charles Mingus, Jamerson seemed utterly free. Where he placed notes mattered intensely; they surrounded the beat, stuttered across it, loped with an exhilaration that was undeni-

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able, uplifting...soul, the sheer joy of a self-assertive imagination cavorting across a musical canvas that somehow magically freed the listener as well.

In 1965, when the Motown tour went to Britain, the musicians, generally unknown, were to their astonishment greeted by a James Jamerson Fan Club.

The idea that jazz sophistication and blues fervor could meld into popular music was the legacy of Atlantic Records, that feisty indie that became a major label on the strength of r&b and soul, then eventually signed the Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin. In its pioneering days of the 1940s and '50s, when it was one of the premiere labels putting out jazz and r&b, it developed a methodology for its recording sessions: Take an r&b vocal star like Big Joe Turner; hire jazz musicians for their range, creative spark and reading skills, drawing again and again from a familiar rotating cast to encourage interplay and improvisation; put together charts and rehearse; have the bluesy or gospelly singer weave through them. *Voilà*! Jerry Wexler (who, as a *Billboard* writer, had coined the term rhythm and blues) and Ahmet Ertegun, Atlantic's chief honchos, essentially copied this recipe from Ray Charles, who had stirred it even in his early days as a devout and somewhat colorless Nat King Cole, and heated it to fever pitch with churchy sounds gone sinful in 1950s classics like "I Got a Woman" and "What'd I Say." Compared with most jazz recording of the time, which was low-budget and haphazard and further attenuated by widespread use of drugs like heroin, the process was surprisingly precise, well tooled and organized, and yielded artistically fruitful as well as profitable results.

Moving On

Gordy adapted the Atlantic model to his Motown style. He hired the core of his studio crew in 1959 and kept adding (and occasionally subtracting) as time went by. He put most of them under exclusive contract; they flouted him by playing at jazz dives and strip joints, the kind of places where everyone packed heat. (Strip joints were staples of 1950s jazz life, when other gigs dried up. It was in that milieu that Lenny Bruce met the jazz musicians who were his earliest fans, watching him evolve ersatz Borscht Belt shtick toward free-wheeling improvised satires of American foibles on race, sex and religion.) A couple of the Funk Brothers point out in the movie how rhythms they cut in the studio came from gigging with Lottie the Body, an exotic dancer who'd worked with Count Basie—especially Afro-Cuban rhythms, like the sinuous lick structuring "I Heard It Through the Grapevine." There's footage of Joe Hunter digging into bebop piano, and Joe Messina wailing bebop guitar on a 1955 Soupy Sales TV show; from their jazz gigs, the Funk Brothers transported voicings and melodies and lines into the Snake Pit, as they called the converted garage that was Hitsville's studio. "When the producers would hear those jazz changes, they'd say, 'That's hip,'" recalls one. And Motown may well have been the only label outside Atlantic to feature vibes, a jazz instrument, on pop hits.

The Funk Brothers were overwhelmingly African-American, but there were longtime white participants, like guitarist Messina. "They used to call us the Oreo cookie guitar section," he reminisces during the film; for years, Motown's three session guitarists sat in black-white-black order. When the Detroit riots erupted in 1967, one in a series that flashed across the country during those years, the Funk Brothers hung together: Emerging from the studio, their workplace and prison, to a city in flames, the black musicians looked out for their white colleagues—their friends. Music, the intensity of prolonged side-by-side creative work under factory conditions, forged a bond that the movie periodically, to its credit, manages to capture without lapsing into sentimentality. It was the musicians' meshing at several levels, after all, that showed in Motown music's ease and power; their mutual respect was clear in the ways they wove around each other's parts. They created those parts, mostly, revamping sketchy arrangements into head charts—arrangements improvised in the studio. Giggling among themselves as they worked out the next session's ideas, they locked their pieces into staggered place, thickening the chords and enhancing the syncopations and slinky beats that Motown rode to hitdom.

In the late 1960s Marvin Gaye began agitating to do a more involved brand of music reflecting the decaying reality of Detroit and America; when Gordy agreed, in 1971 Gaye cut *What's Going On*, giving the Funk Brothers their first unrestricted shot at foregrounding their musicianship within Motown. Their jazz chords came up front, foreshadowing a new kind of soul that thrived in the early 1970s via producer/songwriters like Philadelphia's Gamble and Huff. For the first time, too, the musicians got credit on the album sleeve. At their peak, they would pull down between $25,000 and $60,000 a year, peanuts compared with what Ross or Gordy was raking in. So inevitably, they cut tracks for other Detroit studios—and risked getting canned to do it. Motown paid informers to shadow

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them, and fined or fired them when they got caught. The pressure on them was awesome: studio work rolled on 24/7, and they were typically expected to complete four songs per three-hour session. By the late 1960s, they hid out in a nearby funeral parlor to escape the endless sessions.

When the Beatles and Stones first hit the United States, their repertoire was mostly American roots music and Motown. They enthusiastically translated the complex Motown charts into arrangements for four or five musicians of middling ability—extracting the sound, as it were, to a rock quartet. This was like handing out keys to a musical kingdom, and numbers among the most lasting cultural effects of the British Invasion. Suddenly anyone in a garage or basement could take a crack at that irresistible Motown groove—and, in fact, the growing spectrum of soul music. From Chicago, Curtis Mayfield warbled his sweet calls to social awareness, like "People Get Ready" and "Keep on Pushin'"; his guitar style, with its hammer-ons and pull-offs running three-note moving chords behind his vocals, created the template Hendrix would psychedelicize. Otis Redding spearheaded Stax's penetration of white Northern audiences; the second wave, led by Isaac Hayes, reaffirmed the music's blackness. On Atlantic, which pushed forward into soul with Solomon Burke and Wilson Pickett, Aretha Franklin (Ray Charles's truest heir) brought gospel jazz directly and fervently into soul, rocking her piano with a largely white Southern rhythm section from Muscle Shoals, Alabama, reiterating and embodying the lessons Ray Charles had laid out for white and black postwar American youth.

Many of the soul era's brightest stars found a new outlet in blaxploitation movies aimed almost entirely at black audiences. Curtis Mayfield's brilliant, haunting soundtrack for *Superfly* and Isaac Hayes's Oscar-winning music for *Shaft* illustrated the search for a new creative form for soul, paralleling the search in jazz that led perpetual explorers like Miles Davis and Herbie Hancock to fuse their music more and more with funk. But the initial energy and social critique, however cartoony, of the early blaxploitation flicks inevitably paled with the Hollywood assembly-line process, yielding better music than movies.

The 1960s had been a time of optimism, but by the 1970s that optimism was dead or dying, and the reconsolidation of power taking place across society found its analogue in the record industry. Mergers among the majors, and the consequent absorption of indie labels, accelerated. FM radio was formatted in ways more like the vilified AM playlist style—a straitjacket tied even more securely today—than the looser, album-oriented FM of the late 1960s. Stations were increasingly chain-owned, presaging today's near-monopoly situation in the "market." Payola scandals and federal trials for the sorts of practices that also roiled late Motown—counterfeiting records, shipping new releases to industry accomplices as "cutouts" and collecting kickbacks off the books while the company lost money, like a classic mob scam out of *GoodFellas*—punctured the industry after the disco collapse of the late 1970s. Flexing their distribution capacity, major labels created an artificial sales bubble for a largely sterile form that was among Motown's linear descendants. They overshipped records and posted them as huge paper profits; the scam blew up in their faces when returns of unsold goods from record stores swamped their fictionalized bottom lines with red ink.

Enron, anyone?

Disco was the product of the new black-music departments at the major labels, first formed in the early 1970s in response to the challenge posed by indies like Gordy. One result: Black music, with rare exceptions, was again ghettoized within new-minted formats like "urban contemporary"; but unlike in the old days of "black" radio, the urban contemporary playlists were perforated with white "crossover" artists. This was not, however, a two-way street. Black musicians were once again, as they had been up through the 1950s, expected to play for "their" market. To take just one example, Chic, synonymous with disco hits, formed as a rock and soul band. When their demos circulated around record companies and landed them appointments, the jaws of the executives across the table inevitably slackened when guitarist Nile Rodgers and bassist Bernard Edwards strode in. "You guys did this tape? But you're black—you should be doing disco," was one standard response. Years later, both musicians told me, "We finally gave up."

In the 1980s musicians like Vernon Reid, guitarist from Living Colour, and vocalist Cassandra Wilson helped form the Black Rock Coalition to counter the new ghettoization publicly. But only with hip-hop's cultural impact would the pendulum start to swing back. It was a nice historical irony that the Sugar Hill Gang's first rap hit and harbinger of the future, 1979's "Rapper's Delight," used Chic's "Good Times" as its backing track. Within a couple of years the success of Sugar Hill Records, a black-owned indie, spawned small rap-oriented labels. The cycle was ready to repeat. ■

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DIANE RAFFERTY

SAVION GLOVER

It's a shame that Savion Glover is trying so hard to hide from the world, because he's the greatest tap dancer who ever breathed. Glover is touring the United States and Japan through June 2003 in his show *Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk*, which won four Tony awards when it was on Broadway in 1996; but he has significantly reduced his dance time in it, giving over the important role of 'Da Kid to an adequate but unexceptional 12-year-old tapper named Cartier Williams, a member of Glover's tap ensemble, Ti Dii.

Noise/Funk attempts in two acts to tell the entire history of the African-American experience with songs, tap, voiceover narration, projected photographic stills, a drum-heavy orchestra and other percussion (pots and pans, etc.). All these elements are meant to come together synergistically into something called "'da beat"—a driving force apparently (in the show's mystique) unique to African-Americans. In the show, Glover and co-creator/director George Wolfe make fun of such tap legends as Bill Robinson (who appeared in many Shirley Temple movies) and the Nicholas Brothers for having sold out to white Hollywood with their "flash and grin" style. Of course, the ensemble tappers aren't able to replicate the genius of these famous dancers, so the mockery falls particularly flat. (For a beautiful homage to Robinson, see Gregory Hines's film *Bojangles*, available on video.)

Glover embodies so many contradictions that he draws energy from their mutual combustion: He looks and dresses like a child, although he's 29; he loathes performing, yet he plays an audience like a piano, knowing exactly which effects will elicit the most applause; he believes tap is music, that it should be heard and not necessarily seen, yet, with his beaded dreadlocks that fly around his head as he turns, his brightly colored baggy cutoffs that accentuate the extreme length of his legs, and his height-enhancing woolly Rastafarian hats, he puts on an eye-popping display. He says everything from the waist up doesn't matter in tap, yet his upper body moves with exquisite balance and counterpoint to his lower half: He often dances hunched over, with rounded arms and cupped hands like an angel's wings canopied over, framing, as it were, the miracles he's doing with his generous feet. His reedy shins and calves, microphoned ankles in bunched white socks and loosely held feet in black tap shoes suggest a heraldic falcon's talons, which alternately fly from and hammer into the floor. Glover is so at one with his shoes that you are always aware of his toes, front pads and heels, each part creating different percussive sounds. His shoed feet are prehensile. Glover works the floor and the air much as a great pianist works the keyboard: Energy, tone and inflection emanate from his body's center—the base of his spine—through his limbs, then extremities. It's all touch.

In late November, I went to the Providence Black Repertory Company in the beautifully restored downtown of the port and capital of Rhode Island (the first state to prohibit the importation and trading of slaves, in 1774) to see Glover give what was billed as a half-hour lecture demonstration. (Why only a half-hour? I never found out.) The event was by invitation only and the place was packed, downstairs and on a balcony with a view of a small, banked, empty stage. I was happy to see so many young people but not surprised that there were hardly any whites, judging by the "invitation only" format and by the fairly ugly Afrocentric message intoned throughout Reg Gaines's wordy—to the point of drowning out the tap—libretto to *Noise/Funk*. The event had been delayed by an hour (no reason given), so anticipation ran high. After another ten minutes, the sound of tapping could be heard along with recorded music, and Glover's bowed head could be glimpsed swaying behind the stage. At first, everyone took this to be a cute way of entering the stage, but after several more minutes

Diane Rafferty trained as a professional dancer at the School of American Ballet and writes about dance for MusicalAmerica.com. Her articles have appeared in The New Yorker, *the* New York Times *and England's* Spectator, *among other publications.*

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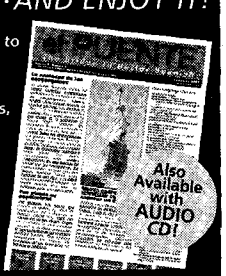

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of Glover's head bobbing and the audience straining to see him, someone (OK, me) spoke up, "Can we see your feet, please?" Moments of silence passed. Then, in answer to my question, Glover raised his pair of tap shoes and dangled them above the stage. No one laughed. That seemed to do the trick because Glover hopped on stage and starting tapping one foot metronomically while telling the audience all about his show, *Noise/Funk*, and why they should all buy tickets to see it the following evening at the Providence Performing Arts Center. He then graciously took a few questions from the crowd. One man said he liked Glover's solo in the show in which he pays homage to four great hoofers—Lon Chaney, Jimmy Slyde, Buster Brown and Chuck Green—demonstrating to perfection their distinctive styles. (It's my favorite bit, too.) I think the fellow was hoping Glover would do it then and there. Instead, Glover asked for, and rejected, a succession of musical recordings before giving a thumbs up to some Bob Marley. To the beautifully rich reggae beat, he then soared into some of the most spectacular, most thrilling minutes of dance I have ever witnessed—the fastest, clearest, hardest, most toying-with-the-rhythm, superhuman tap imaginable. Then it was over almost as soon as it began, and Glover coaxed a little girl from the audience to join him on stage and announced, "Anybody can tap."

I waited half an hour while Glover signed autographs: I was told that I would be the last person to interview him and that I had to stick to the allotted ten minutes. Fine. He was sitting with his sneakers unlaced, so, because it's the first thing every dancer really wants to know about another dancer and because by this time I wanted to cut to the chase, I asked Glover to show me his feet and offered to show him mine, which are pretty banged up from toe dancing. He refused. I quickly moved on.

Because my grandfather, who was Scottish, was a good tap dancer, I then asked Glover whether he acknowledged any Celtic influence on tap. He said, "What's Celtic?" I tried to explain, feeling distinctly "ofay"—the old jazz term that is pig Latin for "foe." Incredulous, Glover said sarcastically, "Oh, you mean *Riverdance*? No, there is no white influence on tap." Since I'm not a masochist, I cut the interview short, politely pointed out that his own book, *Savion: My Life in Tap*, co-written by Bruce Weber, mentions Scottish and Irish influences on tap, and handed him a gift I'd brought: a CD of Arthur Rubinstein playing Beethoven's *Piano Concerto No. 5 ("Emperor")*, on the inside of which I had written, "To Savion: Your feet remind me of Rubinstein's hands." I left without looking back. ■

LETTERS
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 2)

kids once had with adults—a broken bond that schools could work to mend—is an important insight that Meier might have made the centerpiece of her book and developed accordingly.

I did not specifically mention the "V" word in my argument about the Bush Administration's covert strategy to privatize the nation's schools. Indeed, the Administration has cleverly devised the cynical tactic to tone down the voucher rhetoric in favor of bureaucratic rules implemented under the "No Child Left Behind" law that quietly produce the same results as vouchers. As Bernstein seems to suggest, if it quacks like a voucher, it's a voucher.

Walt Gardner's phrasing is curious, suggesting to readers who might have missed the review that I'm one of the "critics" who contend that schools should be run like a business, which, as Howard Bluth notes in his letter, is the exact opposite of what I wrote. PETER SACKS

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For, um, Ogden Nash, who's far more fillin'.

JONATHAN BLACK
Playboy *magazine*

THE EDITORS REPLY (ODE TO BUD)

New York City

Have you no shame, Mr. Black!
A sense of humor you sorely lack.
The reason we're not willin'
To fire Calvin Trillin
Is that readers would rebel
And raise all kinds of hell.
So back off, Black
Trillin we'll never sack.
That settles your hash!
(Who the hell is Ogden Nash?)

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■ There is one saving tincture of truth in the verbose and complacent letter which you saw fit to publish from Studs Terkel ["Letters," Jan. 6]. He and I did indeed have a cocktail "just a couple of years ago" in Chicago. And I did tell him with some pride that Gore Vidal had offered an overgenerous endorsement of my third volume of collected essays, *Unacknowledged Legislation*. (This is pretty easy to confirm, since the almost too-fulsome encomium is the only quotation on the jacket of the book, published as it was in the year 2000 and available in bookstores when I was in Chicago that day.)

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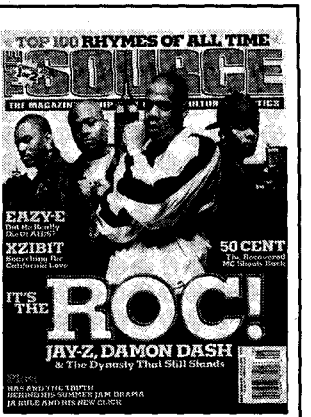

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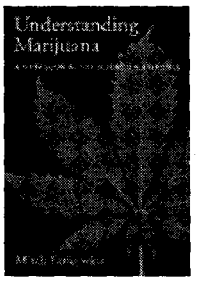

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I have since had some disagreements with both Vidal and Terkel. In the case of the former, I cannot think of anything excerpted from private conversation that would, if disclosed, strengthen my argument. In the latter case, it is something more than modesty, or even respect for my elders, that restrains me from replying in kind. But good luck to *The Nation* in circulating this kind of stuff. You have obviously reached a point where every little bit helps.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

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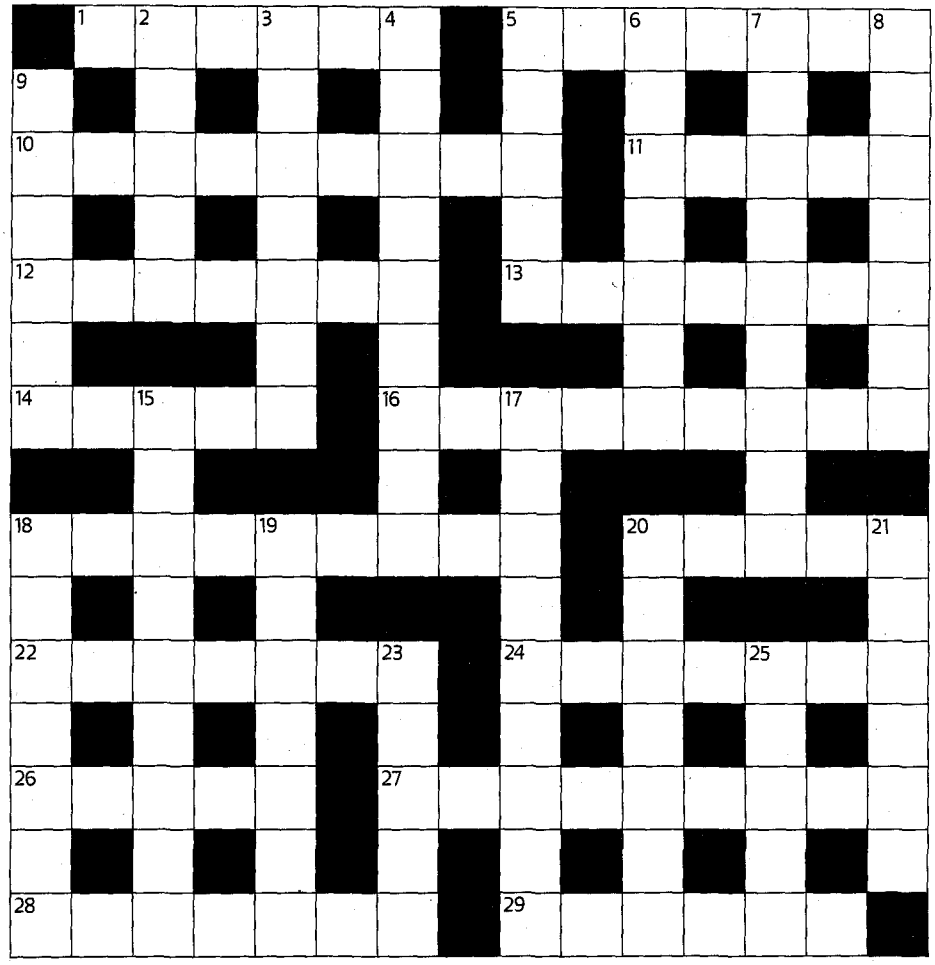
PUZZLE NO. 2876

FRANK W. LEWIS



ACROSS

1 and **5** This could be earth-shattering! (6,2,5)

10 One of the old Ottoman Empire is sunburned in a vast region. (9)

11 A neighbor of 10 with a twisted tail. (5)

12 Something given right here and now? (7)

13 Not quite perfect, considering one may be a student big shot! (7)

14 Pass on the information—it may be an electrical control device. (5)

16 The train of thought of the original Americans. (4,5)

18 Possibly acute goal, which we usually shorten for the list. (9)

20 Namely, what to do with a broken-down car, it appears. (2,3)

22 Procrastinates with what comes back up, and a soft version which ends loud. (4,3)

24 The sign of the sleeper says not to do it. (7)

26 Spoke in the plural form. (5)

27 A technical college, perhaps, is a way to put something into action. (9)

28 What the lecher has on, when it comes to women—in many shapes. (7)

29 Foxy? It's about time you see the way the wise man talks! (6)

DOWN

2 and **15** Where the trade winds aren't might imply Dobbin has some leeway, to a point. (5,9)

3 A vain presentation at a town in Nevada, but only the green type would speak so. (7)

4 What the ticket may say it's doing to you, for the present? If you are, you name it! (9)

5 Confess, it's a way to possess something going other than down! (3,2)

6 Things are running on track here, but that's a way to say "Hello!" to a person such as Jacob's wife! (7)

7 and **23** Straight, but a lot of flap this way! (2,3,4,5)

8 The thing here let out finally to be a real sticker! (7)

9 Puts up with, alternatively, a dumb condition! (6)

15 See 2

17 Taking them, people have too much of "just what the doctor ordered"! (9)

18 Is what is thrown over the shoulder scarlet? (The antics did!) (7)

19 Some shoppers are just this, as they say… (7)

20 …and the guy fooling around with the microphone may be just this, as he says. (7)

21 In their turn, the joke may be on you, but you may detect a number in the wild beast! (6)

23 See 7

25 The thing the frequenter of the bar may ask for. (5)

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 2875

	M	I	S	C	H	I	E	F	M	A	K	E	R	
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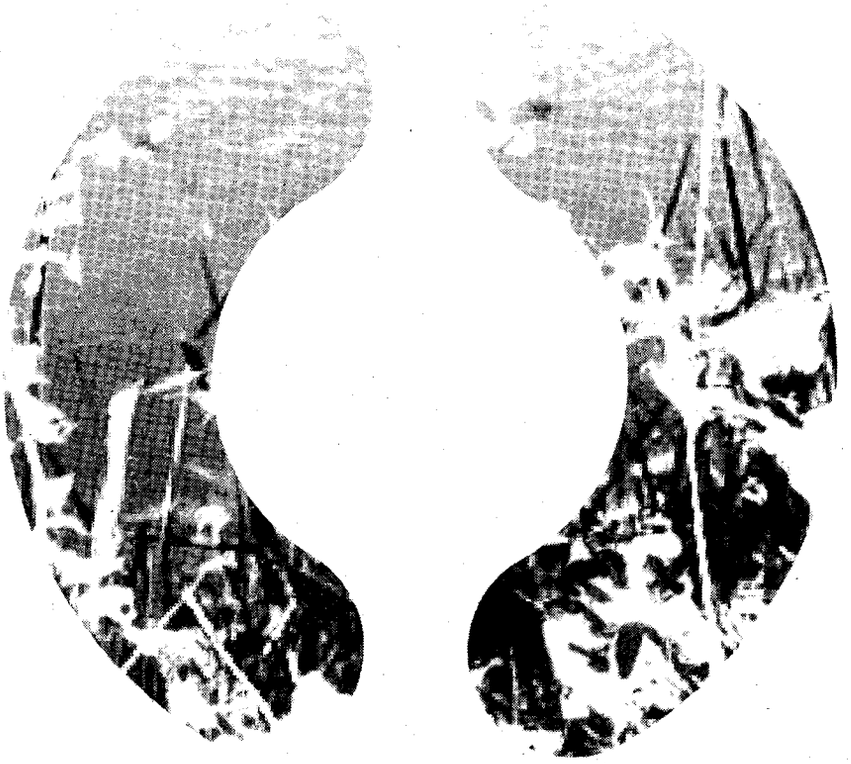

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